

**Genre and Gender in Translation:  
The Poetological and Ideological Rewriting of  
Heroine-Centred and Women-Oriented Fiction**

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I declare that this thesis has been solely composed by me and that the work is my own. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

## Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of poetics and ideology on the French translations of eight contemporary heroine-centred and women-oriented fictional texts (including Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*). Using a systemic and descriptive framework (Toury 1995) as well as works on manipulation in translation (Lefevere 1992)(Venuti 1998), I explore the various ways in which these generically hybrid and ideologically complex texts have been rewritten according to the dominant poetics and ideology of the French *roman sentimental*. Interviews undertaken with editors and translators identify the perceived appeal of these texts to the French market: their romantic plot. As a comparative analysis of originals and translations reveals, this resulted in specific translational strategies regarding gender representations, notably poetological elements subverting a dominant model of romantic femininity.

This thesis sheds light on the subtle differences between French and Anglo-American generic traditions and gender ideologies and its contribution is three-fold. Firstly, it adds to an emerging body of case studies which examine poetological and ideological revisions in the French translations of heroine-centred and women-oriented fictional texts (Cossy 2004, 2006, 2006a)(Le Brun 2003). Secondly, as the selection of a thematically – rather than formally – linked corpus of texts is still relatively uncommon in translation and intercultural studies, this thesis advances a new paradigm in the analysis of poetics and ideology in translation (Munday 2008): a self-reflexive approach which favours transversal examinations of specific aspects in thematically linked corpora. Thirdly, this study suggests that if women's entertainment, produced and translated for mass consumption, reaches a broad audience worldwide and plays an important part in women's socialisation, interdisciplinary studies of translations across forms can constitute a useful way of detecting the unspoken gender values of the cultures for which and by which they are produced.

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## Abbreviations

<i>AMB</i>	<i>Ally McBeal</i>
AVT	Audiovisual Translation
CR	Consciousness Raising
CSA	Conseil supérieur de l’audiovisuel
<i>BJD</i>	<i>Bridget Jones’s Diary</i>
GF	Grand Format
MLF	Mouvement de Libération des Femmes
<i>MLOP</i>	<i>My Life On a Plate</i>
<i>MM</i>	<i>Mr Maybe</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>SATC</i>	<i>Sex and the City</i>
ST	Source Text
<i>TDWP</i>	<i>The Devil Wears Prada</i>
<i>TLFi</i>	<i>Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé</i>
TT	Target Text
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two

## Introduction

In an interview about her international bestseller *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Helen Fielding explains that her heroine strikes a chord with so many readers worldwide because she encapsulates modern femininity as experienced by millions of women 'groping through the complexities of dealing with relationships in a morass of shifting roles, and a bombardment of idealised images of modern womanhood' (in Whelehan 2002: 17). In the context of this 'global phenomenon' (Lewis-Smith 1999: 35), translation – the means by which the character Bridget Jones has been made available to non-English speaking readerships – is rarely addressed unless it is used to confirm that Fielding 'has created a modern heroine of apparently global appeal' (Elbendary 2000). The fact that *Bridget Jones's Diary* has been translated into at least thirty-three languages (Whelehan 2002: 14) appears to speak for itself: Bridget's modern femininity has been relevant to a much larger constituency than the one for which the novel was originally written.

Comments about the international success of Fielding's book thus reveal a common belief: translations are identical to their originals (Venuti 1998: 51) and not independent texts deliberately rewritten to conform to the dominant poetics and ideology of their translating cultures (Lefevere 1992a: 87)(Venuti 1998: 67). Thinking of translation in terms of poetics and ideology does not seem to be in the interest of international bestselling authors, the reviewing apparatus or the publishing industry: doing so would challenge the notion that certain works possess universal appeal and would question the social authority of cultural institutions (Venuti 1998: 1). In the present thesis, I propose to place poetics and ideology in the foreground in order to understand their impact on the French versions of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and seven other similar heroine-centred and women-oriented fictional texts. My intention is to bring to light ideologically and poetologically motivated transformations as regards modern femininity, the shifting roles and idealised images with which Bridget and other heroines have been claimed to struggle and embody.

In this introduction, I first define my corpus and situate this project within the discipline of translation studies by outlining its overall theoretical framework. I then summarise the principal approaches adopted and their implications for the structure and scope of this thesis.

## 1. Corpus and Theoretical Framework

The corpus selected for this thesis consists of eight texts<sup>1</sup>: Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (*BJD*) published in 1996; its cinematic adaptation produced by Working Title in 2001; the novel *Sex and the City* (*SATC*) by Candace Bushnell published in 1996; the first season of its televisual adaptation produced and first broadcast by HBO in 1998; the first twelve episodes of the television series *Ally McBeal* (*AMB*) produced and first broadcast by Fox in 1997; Jane Green's *Mr Maybe* (*MM*) published in 1999; India Knight's *My Life on a Plate* (*MLOP*) published in 2000; and Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* (*TDWP*) published in 2003. Three factors have motivated this selection. Firstly, these heroine-centred and women-oriented novels, series and films have been repeatedly linked to the same 'chick' cultural phenomenon which emerged in Britain and America in the mid-to-late 1990s (Phillips 2000: 238)(Grochowski 2004: 152)(Mabry 2006). Secondly, as the 'chick' of 'chick lit', 'chick flicks' and 'chick television series' (hereafter collectively 'chick texts') appears to refer simultaneously to the central female character, the female reader or viewer and very often the female author, this triply feminine nature makes chick texts an ideal primary material for the study of modern gender ideologies. Whilst it is too early to determine whether a subfield such as 'chick cultural studies' (Ferriss and Young 2008: 1) within cultural studies is indeed in the making, the growing number of academic publications on chick texts and the variety of approaches applied demonstrate how culturally significant these novels, films and television series have been felt to be across a number of disciplines and, perhaps unsurprisingly, amongst female and feminist researchers. Thirdly, while chick texts' generic hybridity and ideological complexity have inspired a wide range

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'text' is understood here in its broadest sense (as it is in cultural studies, translation studies, film studies, television studies and sociology) and includes both literary and audiovisual works.

of academic responses, research on chick texts in translation has been limited to a few examples (Scandura 2004)(Santaemilia 2005a: 120-121) or to a single text (Raigaišienė 2006)(Chiaro 2007).

Although gender and translation is not a new object of research, the study of gender representation and ideology in translation still appears to be in its infancy. So far, feminist translation scholars and translators have been primarily concerned with women's role in translation history, translation's role in women's history, alternative feminist translation practices (Simon 1996)(von Flotow 1997) and the gendered metaphors of translation (Chamberlain 1992). This diversity reflects how

gender studies and translation studies are both interdisciplinary academic fields. When they are brought into relationship with one another, a number of issues intersect: cultural gender differences, the revelation and formulation of these differences in language, their transfer by means of translation into other cultural spaces where different gender conditions obtain. (von Flotow 1997: 1)

Yet, while translation as a means of feminist subversion has been well-documented, little research has been undertaken on translation as a marginalising force against women and feminism, despite the known ideological distortions in the English translation of *The Second Sex* (Simons 1983). As Leonardi observes (2007: 23), it is remarkable that Simons's short study did not lead to further research of this type. *Gender, Sex and Translation: The Manipulation of Identities* (2005) appears to be the first collection in English which examines gender and ideological positioning in translation and more particularly in translated fiction. In the introduction, Santaemilia notes that 'the translation of gender or sex is not an innocent affair, and it involves not only cross-cultural transfer but a cross-ideological one' (2005: 6). Leonardi's recent study (2007) which compares strategies of male and female translators is also unique in exploring ideologically motivated shifts in translation as a result of gender and cultural differences. The selection of a thematically – rather than formally – linked corpus of texts is also relatively uncommon in translation studies. A notable exception to this is the recently published *Style and Ideology in Translation* (Munday 2008) which explores both written and audiovisual texts. Munday's work suggests that thematically linked corpora may lend themselves better to the study of poetological and ideological parameters in translation.

The relative current scarcity of studies on the impact of gender and ideology on the translation process is all the more surprising when one considers that poetics and ideology has become an increasingly common object of research in translation studies. In the wake of the ‘cultural turn’ of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the discipline, formerly concerned with what constitutes a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ translation, significantly widened its scope to include the socio-cultural constraints under which translated texts are initiated, produced, circulated and read. The increasing realisation that ‘translations are never produced in a vacuum and that they are also never received in a vacuum’ (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998: 3) has led to a variety of approaches intending to determine how translation functions (Vermeer 2000)(Nord 1997), manipulates (Hermans 1985), constructs (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998) and rewrites (Lefevere 1992). In the subfield of audiovisual translation, the importance of integrating the socio-cultural frame has also been acknowledged (Delabastita 1990)(Goris 1993)(Gottlieb 2004). In the development of what can now be defined as the descriptive and explanatory branch of translation studies (Toury 1995: 2), Even-Zohar’s system theory has been instrumental in shifting the focus from the isolated study of individual texts towards the study of translations in their cultural and literary contexts (Munday 2003: 111).

Influenced by the Russian Formalists of the 1920s, Even-Zohar views texts – including translated texts – in relation to and as part of a literary system, which is itself in continual interrelationship with other systems such as the social system, the cultural system, etc. (Munday 2003: 109). As he explains, ‘translated works do correlate in two ways: in the way that they are selected and in the way they adopt specific norms, behaviours and policies which are a result of their relations with the home co-systems’ (1978: 118). Such relations, Even-Zohar argues, largely determine the position of works within systems: a text occupies a central position if it actively participates in shaping the centre (or canon) (2000: 193) whilst a peripheral position implies the opposite. Importantly, the hypothesis that a body of works – original or translated – is either central or peripheral does not imply that it is inherently one or the other: every body of works has its own stratified system within which individual works will either occupy a central or peripheral position (2000: 195). Centre and periphery thus depend largely on which angle and which system they are perceived

from, although relations within a system are often observed from the central stratum in systemic analysis (Ibid.). In this thesis, I do not seek to elaborate on Even-Zohar's hypothesis but intend to make use of it – as many have done – as a cognitive metaphor, 'a map to make sense of territory' (Lefevere in Hermans 1999: 126). The contextual top-down target-oriented model to which the system theory has given rise (Hermans 1999: 64) as well as the concepts of centre and periphery have all been useful in making sense of the French cultural context and in delineating the systemic parameters most likely to influence the production and position of the French versions of chick texts in the literary and audiovisual systems of France.

As Shuttleworth remarks, Even-Zohar's system theory 'is not a complete, watertight package but rather a point of departure for further work' (2001: 179) and as such, it has influenced the direction of many translation studies scholars, amongst whom Lefevere whose work on poetics and ideology in translation has been particularly relevant to this thesis. According to Lefevere, the formation of systems and canons within systems is dominated by 'concrete factors that are relatively easy to discern as soon as one decides to look for them [...] and begins to address issues such as power, ideology, institution and manipulation' (1992: 2). Lefevere considers that poetics and ideology play a more important role in the production of translations than linguistic differences (1992a: 87). Lefevere's definition of ideology has raised objections, notably from Hermans (1999: 126-127). In this thesis, the meaning of 'ideology' will be closer to what Bassnett and Lefevere call a 'textual grid' (1998: 5): 'the collection of acceptable ways in which things can be said' (Ibid.). As Hermans notes, this concept straddles both poetics and ideology (1998: 128) and as this thesis will show, poetics and ideology are notions which can be difficult to disentangle. Whilst Hermans likens Bassnett and Lefevere's concept of textual grids to prescriptive and proscriptive norms (Ibid.), it has seemed more appropriate in the context of this project to redefine 'textual grids' as dominant ideological currents and rethink them in linguistic terms. In the same way as Lefevere places ideology and poetics over and above language as regards their impact on translations, Bassnett and Lefevere consider that textual grids 'exist on a level that is deeper or higher [...] than that of language' (1998: 5). They add that 'textual grids can, and do, appear given for all eternity only when, as so often happens, they have been interiorised by human beings

to such an extent that they have become totally transparent for them, that they appear “natural” (Ibid.). I would like to suggest that the natural and transparent appearance of textual grids is only possible thanks to the naturalisation of an ideological discourse through language. In Fairclough’s words:

discoursal common-sense is *ideological* to the extent that it contributes to sustaining unequal power relations, directly or indirectly. Ideology, however, is not inherently commonsensical: certain ideologies acquire that status in the course of ideological struggles, which take the linguistic form of struggles in social institutions between ideologically diverse discourse types [...]. A dominant discourse is subject to a process of *naturalisation*, in which it appears to lose connection with particular ideologies and interests and become the common-sense practice of the institution. Thus when ideology becomes common sense, it apparently ceases to be ideology; this is itself an ideological effect, for ideology is truly effective only when it is disguised. (Fairclough 2001: 89, italics in original)

In the present thesis, the poetological and ideological constraints under which the French translations of chick texts have been produced will not be viewed as more important than linguistic constraints. Instead, poetics and ideology will be understood as constraints which are expressed via language. The precise definition of ideology in this thesis, whilst remaining essentially close to Bassnett and Lefevere’s notion of textual grids, emphasises the linguistic dimension in the same manner as Munday in *Style and Ideology in Translation* (2008: 8): ideology is a system of beliefs which is linguistically realised and which informs perceptions of the world as it is and/or should be. From this perspective, a dominant ideology is a dominant system of beliefs which is linguistically realised, naturalised and ‘reflected in apparent fixity of the “dictionary” meanings of words’ (Fairclough 2001: 89) and which informs apparently natural and commonsensical perceptions of the world as it is and/or should be.

Lefevere’s definition of poetics appears to have been more straightforwardly accepted and will be used in this thesis. Lefevere defines poetics as the combination of two components: the inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters, situations and symbols and the idea of what the function of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole (1992: 26). As he remarks, this last functional component is closely related to ideological forces from outside the poetological sphere (1992: 27) and is often generated by what he calls ‘patronage’,

i.e. the powers (persons and/or institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing and rewriting of literature (1992: 15). Drawing on Even-Zohar's system hypothesis, Lefevere advances that the canonisation of certain works and the codification of a poetics in literary systems are both the cause and the effect of each other: codification entails the canonisation of authors whose work is regarded as conforming most closely to the codified poetics (1992: 28). These writers' texts are then presented as models for future writers to follow and occupy a central position in the teaching of literature (Ibid.). Lefevere sees the professionals working within the literary system as playing an important role in the formation of canons and poetics: individuals such as critics, reviewers, teachers, translators – and one could add editors – reject texts which overly conflict with the dominant idea of what literature should be – poetics – and of what society should be – ideology (1985: 226)(1992: 14). Often, professionals in the literary sphere will rewrite and adapt texts until they are deemed acceptable to the poetics and ideology of their time and place (Ibid.). In doing so, these professionals facilitate the task of the patrons who regulate the relationship between the literary system and the other systems which, collectively, form a society and culture (1992: 15). Of course, poetological and ideological constraints are conditioning factors but they are not absolutes: individuals can choose to go against them (Lefevere 1985: 237 and 1992a: 86). As Lefevere notes, 'neither the poetics nor the ideology of a culture is monolithic. Rather they consist of one dominant current and various countercurrents or peripheral currents' (1992a: 86). Subversion and transformation do occur and depend on where the guardians of the dominant poetics and ideology stand (Lefevere 1985: 237) and whether the need for a change is perceived by patronage as essential for the system to be or remain functional (1992: 23).

## **2. Scope and Structure**

Lefevere's emphasis on the role of poetics, patronage and ideology in the rewriting of texts has informed a number of decisions regarding the scope and methodology of this thesis. In Chapter 1, chick texts are explored from a social, commercial, cultural



and historical perspective in order to determine the powers that furthered their production, circulation and consumption in the US and the UK. To this end, chick texts are analysed in parallel to preceding women-oriented texts with which they share important ideological and poetological features.

These predecessors' rewriting and position in the French cultural system provide a point of reference in Chapter 2 which examines the cultural context into which chick texts have been introduced. In order to locate chick texts' poetological and ideological aspects which are most likely to conflict with the dominant poetics and ideology of the target system, the focus will be on the dominant concept of what heroine-centred and women-oriented fictional texts are in France and what role they are believed to fulfil in French society.

Chapter 3 focuses on the issue of patronage and individual and institutional initiators of the French versions of chick texts. While Chapter 2 provides a panoramic picture of the French cultural system, this chapter 'zooms in' and uses functional theories in order to closely examine the production of the translations as a process involving a series of roles and players. Having developed independently but more or less simultaneously with systemic approaches (Hermans 1999: 37), functional approaches to translation display a similar 'target-orientedness' (Toury 1995: 25). Functional theories, and notably the *skopos* theory, present themselves as a form of applied translation, more concerned with professional translating than the literary sphere (Hermans 1999: 37). Despite this difference, the common ground between the two target-oriented paradigms has grown sufficiently to make a functional model useful in delineating the specific conditions of the production of given translations within a wider systemic framework. Based on the premise that any action has an aim or a purpose (Vermeer 2000: 221), the *skopos* theory contends that all texts, including literary and translated ones, are produced for a given purpose (Nord 1997: 29)(Vermeer 2000: 225). Placing the translation in its context of production, functionalists see the initiator as playing a particularly important role for it is she or he who commissions the translational action and specifies the *skopos* (Vermeer 2000: 221). Functionalists' emphasis on the function of texts and the role of the initiating individual or institution here appears to intersect with Lefevere's notion of patronage

and its connection to the function of literature in the social system. Integrating a functional approach within the wider systemic and descriptive framework of this thesis has provided me with the necessary conceptual tools to approach the French patrons and producers of chick target texts (or chick TTs) and analyse their profile, their practices and their ultimate aims for the translations within the wider social and cultural systems of France.

The textual impact of poetics and ideology on chick TTs is examined in Chapters 4 and 5. My comparative analysis is based on Toury's descriptive model – one of the most significant extensions of Even-Zohar's target-oriented approach (Shuttleworth 2001: 179). Toury's method provides a flexible base from which I retain a number of principles: the identification of shifts<sup>2</sup> through paired segments from a source text (ST) and a target text (TT), the organisation of these pairs according to patterns of choices made by translators (1995: 37) and the use of identified shifts as 'a step towards the formulation of *explanatory hypotheses*' (1995: 85, italics in original). Toury defines translational shifts as shifts 'from a certain notion of "maximal" or "optimal" rendering' which can be studied 'if deemed justified, interesting and/or feasible' (Ibid.). As will be explained below, the standard according to which translational shifts are assessed in Chapters 4 and 5 has been informed by a specific theoretical and ideological stance. My approach does not share Toury's focus on translational norms and thus does not seek to formulate general laws of translational behaviour (1995: 69) or offer solutions for decision-making in future translating and translation training (1995: 255-258). Indeed, this direction seems to revert to a prescriptive approach from which descriptive translation studies claims to depart. However, as Simeoni has remarked, Toury's work enables one to study translation as well as use translation to explore other matters (Simeoni in Toury 2008: 407). What will be explored in Chapters 4 and 5 is 'one problem-area across texts' (Toury 1995: 85) – the representation of certain aspects of modern femininity – in 'a body of texts selected according to one principle or another' (Ibid.) – here eight texts similar in terms of authorship, target audience, commercial success, thematic content and perceived social realism and relevance. Toury's work has been criticised for the way

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<sup>2</sup> A term first used by Catford (2000: 141).

in which it may neglect important ‘ideological and political factors such as the status of ST in its own culture’ (Munday 2001: 117) and for the perceived partiality and lack of rigour of his comparative method (2001: 113). The present thesis seeks to address these shortcomings by first situating chick source texts (or chick STs) in their original context of production and reception in Chapter 1 and by clearly stating the ideological angle from which the translations (or chick TTs) are approached in Chapters 4 and 5.

Indeed, the present thesis’s focus on poetics and ideology makes it inevitable to depart from Toury’s emphasis on value-free and uncritical empirical research. As Venuti points out, translational patterns and choices

may be in the first instance linguistic or literary, but they will also include a diverse range of domestic values, beliefs and social representations which carry ideological force in serving the interests of specific groups. And they are always housed in the social institutions where translations are produced and enlisted in cultural and political agendas. (Venuti 1998: 29)

In this respect, Toury’s model overlooks the theoretical changes that psychoanalysis, feminism, Marxism, and poststructuralism have caused in literary and cultural studies (Ibid.). As Venuti argues, value judgements cannot be avoided: assessing the significance of shifts must be done on the basis of theoretical assumptions and such assumptions should themselves be the object of on-going scrutiny (1998: 28-30). In advocating self-reflexivity, Venuti enables translation studies to consider the ethics of translation practice as well as the ethics of translation research. To a certain extent, Venuti’s argument echoes that of van den Broeck who contends that ‘every translation implies a form of criticism of its original. The translation critic, then, is a critic’s critic for he [*sic.*] brings his value judgement to bear on a phenomenon which by its very nature implies a judgement of values’ (1985: 61). In Chapters 4 and 5, the value judgement cast on chick TTs is informed by two theoretical assumptions: feminism as understood in Anglo-American cultures – a movement and ideology claiming equality of women with men (Cross 1997: 167) – and an academic conception of gender as a socio-cultural and ideological construct (von Flotow 1997: 99). It is from this vantage point that elements of modern femininity pertaining to Anglo-American feminism and repressed by a specific poetics and ideology have become visible and examinable in the French versions of chick texts.

In the conclusion, I review the aims and achievements of this thesis and suggest areas which have not been covered but may be addressed in future research.

# **Chapter One**

## **Source Texts: Heroine-Centred and Women-Oriented Fiction or Chick Texts**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter introduces chick texts in their context of production and reception as a women-oriented, generically hybrid and ideologically complex phenomenon. Although the theoretical approaches adopted here originate in different disciplines – literature, linguistics, sociology, media studies, popular culture studies and gender studies – all tend to share descriptive translation studies’ central tenet: ‘the overriding need to contextualise’ (Toury 1995: 5). To this end, Genette’s ‘paratexts’ (1997) or the ‘liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book’ (1997: i) are used. Genette distinguishes between two types of paratexts: the publisher’s epitext – i.e. messages materially appended to the text (1997: 16-36) – and peritext – i.e. messages located outside the texts and circulating ‘in a virtually limitless physical and social space’ (1997: 344). Genette himself observes that an epitext can become a peritext but primarily conceives this progression as unidirectional (Ibid.). While he acknowledges the presence of initially epitextual ‘press quotations or other laudatory comments’ (1997: 25) in a text’s peritext, he overlooks almost entirely the publisher’s epitext because of its marketing and promotional function (1997: 347). Yet, as will become evident in the case of chick texts, marketing and promotion appear to blur the distinction between epitext and peritext: press reviews regularly materialise on book and DVD covers while fragments of the distributors’ and publishers’ epitexts often appear on reviews circulating on the internet. Unless otherwise indicated, the generic term of paratexts will be used throughout this chapter (as well as Chapters 2 and 3) for both conciseness and simplicity.

After defining chick texts as belonging to a wider Anglo-American multimodal popular phenomenon by and about women in the media in section 2, I turn to chick texts as a women-oriented phenomenon in section 3 where I explore how chick heroines have been seen to encapsulate ordinary, friendly and humorous femininity and used as female representative characters and role models. Section 4 examines the ways in which chick texts could be considered generically hybrid and ideologically complex by examining their links to both conservative and potentially subversive forms of women-oriented texts. Section 4 also summarises the wide range of academic responses to chick texts' representation of femininity in the public and private spheres. Embedding my analysis in Fiske's theory of popular culture as a site of ideological struggle, I shall determine the ideological and generic premise on which the study of chick texts as source texts in this thesis is based.

## **2. An Anglo-American Multimodal Phenomenon**

### **2.1. Origins of Chick Lit and Chick Culture<sup>1</sup>**

Chick lit is a commercially successful genre which emerged in the mid-1990s and led to the development of chick culture defined by Ferriss and Young as 'a group of mostly American and British popular culture media forms focused primarily on twenty-to-thirtysomething middle-class women' (2008: 1). Despite press reports that chick lit has run its course, figures suggest that the genre is a lasting phenomenon and constitutes a staple of publishing profits (Knowles 2004: 2). This publishing phenomenon and the ensuing explosion of chick culture are commonly attributed to

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'chick', 'chick lit', 'chick culture' or 'chick texts' are not meant here in their derogatory sense but in a neutral sense as they are often used by mainstream cultural commentators (Whelehan 2004a: 5), authors (Colgan 2001) and academics (Whelehan 2005)(Ferriss and Young 2006)(Smith 2008). This usage reflects a recent progression of 'chick' from an offensive and patronising label used against women to a label re-appropriated by women to describe themselves and each other. In its 2002 additions series, the *OED* appears to take this trend into account when it defines 'chick lit' as 'occasionally depreciative' and 'chick flick' as 'sometimes depreciative'. In parallel, the *OED* highlights the notion of self-defined female community in both phrases explaining that 'chick lit' is a 'literature by, for, or about women; especially a type of fiction focusing on the social lives and relationships of young professional women and often aimed at readers with similar experiences' and describing a chick flick as a 'film perceived, or marketed, as appealing particularly to women, typically featuring strong female characters and themes of romance, personal relationships, and female solidarity'. In the case of 'chick flick', the *OED* also suggests a comparison with 'buddy movie', i.e. a 'film in which camaraderie between two characters of the same sex (usually men) is a central theme'.

the publication of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (hereafter *BJD*) in 1996 in the UK and in 1998 in the US (Ferriss and Young 2008: 2)(Whelehan 2002: 57, 67-72). The book's paperback edition reached number one in the UK bestseller lists in August 1997, stayed at the top of *The Observer's* list for twenty-five weeks, won 'Book of the year' at the British Book Awards in 1998 and had sold two million copies by 2001 (Whelehan 2002: 67). The genre which *BJD* pioneered took over the book market, saturating it with similar novels promoted to exhaustion on the shelves, displays and windows of both supermarkets and bookselling chains (Bloom 2002: 52). The first use of the label 'chick lit' itself can be traced back to an anthology of women's short stories entitled *Chick-Lit: Postfeminist Fiction* in 1995. Initially ironic (Mazza 2006: 18) and bearing little resemblance to *BJD's* themes, format and tone, the term chick lit began to be associated with Fielding as early as 1998 (Edwards-Jones 1998: 10). Whether Fielding actually created a genre or just helped materialise an existing one remains unclear (Whelehan 2002: 21). What is clear, however, is that her novel very quickly came to define the 'terms on which all other chick lit would be judged' (Whelehan 2002: 67). On the other side of the Atlantic, Candace Bushnell's *Sex and the City* (hereafter *SATC*) is considered the forerunner of American chick lit. First published in 1996, *SATC* became a *New York Times* bestseller in 1997. Published in the UK in 1997, Bushnell's novel had been into reprint eighteen times by 2002.

There are a number of similarities between British *BJD* and American *SATC's* trajectories, notably the way in which both seem to have crossed media and cultural boundaries. Fielding first wrote *BJD* as a column which appeared in 1995 in *The Independent* while Bushnell started writing *SATC* for *The New York Observer* in 1994. Both columns were then published as novels. While *BJD* and its sequel *The Edge of Reason* resulted in movies in 2001 and 2004, *SATC* became a television series in 1998 and a film was released ten years later. This simultaneity explains how easily and quickly UK chick texts have been adopted in the US and vice-versa. First aired in 1997 in America, *Ally McBeal* (hereafter *AMB*) appeared on British Channel 4 in 1998. The same year, American Penguin published *BJD*. 1998 also marked the beginning of *SATC* on American cable channel HBO and on Channel 4 in Britain. Undoubtedly, the success of *BJD* predisposed the British audience to *SATC* and *AMB*

while these last two programs prepared the ground for *BJD*'s reception in the US. In fact, the *New York Times* review of *BJD* took the form of a letter from Ally to Bridget (Whelehan 2002: 58) while the British edition of *SATC* bears Fielding's name and review on its front cover.

The Anglo-American nature of the chick phenomenon is also embodied by the actress chosen to play British Bridget in the adaptation of *BJD*: Texan Renee Zellweger or, as one journalist tellingly defines her, the 'American English Rose' (Iley 2004: 66). British-American exchanges can also play an important part in the plot of chick texts. Both the novel and the series *SATC* open with the fallen fairy tale of an English journalist freshly arrived in New York. In *Four Blondes*, Bushnell sends her last American 'blonde' to London. Jane Green's British heroines often relocate to America (*Jemima J*, *Spellbound*), transatlantic moves which reflect the British author's own relocation. As the next section will explore, this echo between protagonists and producers is characteristic of chick texts. The Anglo-American nature of chick texts seems evident: the coincident appearance of forerunning chick texts in the US and the UK, the swift assimilation of these texts in both countries and the transatlantic shifts of performers, producers and fictional characters. As will be examined in the following section, chick texts appear to cross media boundaries as easily as cultural boundaries.

## **2.2. A Multimodal Popular Ensemble**

A cursory glance at the ever-increasing number of chick texts suggests that the trajectory from a journalistic text to a novelistic text as exemplified by *SATC* and *BJD* is not uncommon. In Britain, for example, Wolff's comic column 'Tiffany Trott' in *The Daily Telegraph* is now a novel. In America, Sohn's novel *Run Catch Kiss* was based on Sohn's own column in the *New York Press*. *SATC* and *BJD* are also not the only chick texts to have progressed from novelistic texts to audiovisual texts. Melissa Senate's *See Jane Date* was turned into a television film in 2003. Kathy Lette's novel *Mad Cows* was adapted to the big screen in 1999. The movie *Someone Like You* was based on Zigman's novel *Animal Husbandry*. The adaptation of Brown's novel *Legally Blonde* became a film in 2001 and was followed by *Legally Blonde 2* in 2003. *Legally Blonde* is now a musical. Appendix 1 gives an



overview of other chick lit titles whose rights had been bought for screen adaptation by 2004.

As a whole, chick texts and their various adapted versions seem to form a nebula in which communicative content can be conveyed through more than one channel (written, visual and aural) and more than one generic mode (journalistic, novelistic, televisual, cinematic and musical). In this sense, chick texts seem to belong to what Kress and van Leeuwen call a 'communicational ensemble' (2001: 111). Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal theory of communication enables one to look at discourses in their entirety by offering 'an analysis of the specificities and common traits of semiotic modes which takes account of their social, cultural and historical production' (2001: 4). According to Kress and van Leeuwen, meaning is now realised through an increasing multiplicity of material resources, cultural modes and communicative media, which the traditional categories of language and generic form cannot adequately analyse (2001). As section 3.1. will demonstrate, Kress and van Leeuwen's view of contemporary communication can be used to explain how chick texts operate as a multimodal discourse on femininity. While it is not within the scope of this thesis to analyse the various manifestations of the chick outside chick texts, a few examples can illustrate how the broader multimodal 'chick' ensemble has pervaded Anglo-American cultures and urban landscapes in recent years. Heroines of audiovisual chick texts are often re-mediated<sup>2</sup> in print, through official or unofficial guides and companions<sup>3</sup>. Chicks are re-mediated digitally via websites, social networks, forums, retailers' and customers' reading lists and chatrooms (Watson 2006: 1)(Smith 2008: 10). Chicks can be seen on magazine covers, billboards, double-deckers, phone-boxes, shop-windows and even on the lids of yogurt pots. They also appear in a variety of products and services: board games, car designs, energy drinks (Ferriss and Young 2008: 2) and theme nights at bars and debating societies (Watson 2006: 1). As section 3.3. will demonstrate, there are other instances where the image of the chick appears outside chick texts. The extent to

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<sup>2</sup> 'Re-mediating' is here used as it is in Media Studies to account for the various ways in which each medium 'responds to, re-deploys, competes with and reforms other media' (Bolter and Grusin in Arthurs 2003: 83).

<sup>3</sup> *That Lawyer Girl: The Unauthorized Guide to Ally's World* or *Sex and the City: Kiss and Tell* (incidentally penned by the aforementioned columnist and novelist Sohn).

which the chick has been replicated *ad nauseam* beyond the formal boundaries of texts and fiction has led commentators to describe the character Bridget Jones as a ‘multi-headed beast’ (Whelehan 2002: 22) and a ‘cultural artefact that is recognisably larger than itself’ (Merkin in Smith 2008: 10). I would like to suggest that the monstrous malleability of the chick reflects popular cultural practices whereby *what* is communicated is more important than *how* it is communicated. Indeed, the ever-adaptable chick seems to operate according to the rules of popular aesthetic which tends to subordinate form to content (Bourdieu 1984: 5). This is what distinguishes the aesthetic adopted by the uncultured masses from the ‘pure’ aesthetic adopted by the cultured elite:

Intellectuals could be said to believe in the representation – literature, theatre, paintings – more than in the things represented, whereas the people chiefly expect representations and the conventions which govern them to allow them to believe ‘naively’ in the things represented. (Ibid.)

While the appreciation of high culture stems from the representation itself, that of popular culture stems from the content of such a representation. The high malleability of the chick, the high adaptability of a chick text as well as the common *chick* designation of the three generic forms (chick lit, chick flicks and chick television) indicate that what is essential to a chick text is not the novelistic or audiovisual way in which it represents the chick, but the chick it represents.

A panoramic look at chick texts and the multimodal ensemble they belong to also reveals a close association with stardom. As a columnist, Fielding already had a fan base before publishing her novel. The same could be said about Bushnell, Knight, Green and other writers. Moreover, audiovisual adaptations and the use of famous performers increase the visibility, accessibility and popularity of chick texts (Smith 2008: 9-10). Via this multimodal ensemble and a culture of celebrities, the figure of the chick is, as Levefere would say, ‘rewritten’ so as to reach non-reading audiences. This multimodal rewriting of the chick can be directly linked to the patronage which furthered the production of chick texts: women in the media.

### 2.3. Patrons: Women in the Media

A look at the immediate situational context in which chick texts have been produced reveals a marked correlation between the feminisation of the mainstream media and the emergence of chick texts. According to Bloom, the publication and success of *BJD* can be explained by the growing number of women working in the publishing industry, notably at the executive level (2002: 52). Seger paints a similar picture of the audiovisual industries where an increasing female presence at the level of direction and production has led to new approaches to story-telling and more interesting women characters (2003: xiv-xv). Asked about the envisaged trajectory of her career, Sarah Jessica Parker, one of the actresses and executive producers of the series *SATC*, answers that she can see herself ‘as a hard-driving producer’ (in Meter 2004: 88). She adds: ‘I don’t think you have to be male to do that. I understand why a lot of actresses are producing now, how seductive it is and how hard it is to not have that control’ (Ibid.). Parker’s words encapsulate two interrelated aspects of chick texts: their emergence is linked to women’s increasing agency as patrons in the media industries (a realm once under masculine control) and chick texts tend to be produced by women in the media about women in the media either at the level of production or performance or both.

Indeed, nowhere is the correlation between chick texts and the feminisation of patronage in the media industries more evident than in chick texts’ fictional content. The media is by far the preferred scene. Many heroines are journalists (Carrie in *SATC* and Clara in *My Life on a Plate* (hereafter *MLOP*)), work in television (Bridget in *BJD*) or in public relations (Samantha in *SATC* and Libby in *Mr Maybe*)<sup>4</sup>. In parallel, the majority of British chick lit writers work or have worked for the media in one way or another. As Brockes points out, the similarity between chick lit writers’ and characters’ profession, age, social background and marital status can be both startling and tediously repetitive:

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<sup>4</sup> The main exception to the media career path is law (Ally in *AMB*, Miranda in *SATC*). Interestingly, chick lawyers tend to be more frequent in American than in British chick texts

Bridget Jones [is] a thirtysomething singleton who lives in London and works in the media, devised by Helen Fielding, a thirtysomething singleton who lives in London and used to work for the BBC and *The Independent*.  
Clara Hutt [is] a thirtysomething mother of two, who lives in east London and works as a journalist, devised by India Knight, a thirtysomething mother of two, who lives in east London and is a journalist for *The Sunday Times*.  
Jemima Jones [is] a twentysomething who lives in London and works as a journalist, devised by Jane Green, who lives in London and was a freelance journalist for eight years. (2000: 2)

In addition, Fielding's real-life friends Tracey McLeod (a television presenter) and Sharon Maguire are known to be the inspirations for Bridget's friends Jude and Sharon (Whelehan 2002: 12). Not incidentally, Maguire became the director of the film *BJD* (Whelehan 2002: 73). Carrie, the heroine of both the novel and the series *SATC*, is considered to be the author's 'autobiographical alter ego' (Bignell 2004: 161) while Carrie's love interest is based on real-life Ron Galotti, the publisher of the magazine *Vogue* (Ibid.). Miranda Priestley, the heroine's boss and editor-in-chief of the fictional magazine *Runway* in Laura Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* (hereafter *TDWP*) is believed to be based on Anna Wintour, the editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, for whom the author worked as an assistant (Cooke 2003: 15). This perpetual echo between writers and fictional characters gives the impression of fictionalised autobiography (Philips 2000: 241)(Bignell 2004: 161) and this is reinforced by the fact that interviewed authors clearly state their main source of inspiration: their personal lives (Davis 2001: 8)(Whelehan 2002: 70)(Hagestadt 2004: 20). The writing of chick texts has thus been both furthered and inspired by women working in the media. As the next section will demonstrate, this has influenced the reception of chick texts, particularly the way in which they have tended to be 'rewritten' as texts encapsulating the essence of ordinary femininity in paratexts.

### **3. A Women-Oriented Phenomenon**

This section first looks at chick texts' coverage, concentrating on specific rewriting practices in their marketing. It then turns to the way in which chick texts have been perceived to emulate female friendship and humour before exploring chick heroines' cultural function as representative characters in contemporary media discourses.

### 3.1. Ordinary Femininity?

As part of a communicational ensemble whose impact reaches beyond the formal boundaries of fictional texts, chick texts seem to have achieved an incomparable level of mainstream media visibility. One of the reasons for this is the common interpretation of chick texts as socially accurate accounts of female reality. An analysis of chick texts' paratexts reveals that as a whole, they seem to operate as a multimodal discourse, i.e. a socially constructed knowledge 'of (some aspect of) reality [which] provide[s] versions of who does what, when and where, [and] add[s] evaluations, interpretations and arguments to these versions' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001: 5-15). As Appendix 2 shows, one of the most praised characteristics of *BJD* is its perceived ability to portray what women do and think at certain times and in certain social situations and to add accurate and humorous evaluations, interpretations and arguments to these female actions and thoughts. While Fielding is seen to have 'captured' the very essence of ordinary womanhood, Zellweger (who incarnates Bridget on film) is said to be 'good at capturing women's fears, needs and wants' (Iley 2004: 69). Bridget is not the only chick heroine to be presented as a 'real' and 'normal' woman. Paratexts tend to use a similar semantic range related to truth and accuracy, presenting chick texts as disturbing emulations of reality. For example, *The Observer*<sup>5</sup> finds that 'Keyes has created three alarmingly recognisable characters' while Green's writing is described as 'irritatingly accurate' by *ELLE*. Bushnell is praised for having 'captured the big, black truth' by Easton Ellis and the actress Kim Cattrall comments that Bushnell's 'book is so insightful. [...] That's what was so scary about it – it was true' (Colon 2004: 48). As Appendix 3 demonstrates, chick lit is believed to give its readership 'poignant', 'honest' and 'brilliant' looks at and takes on specific 'real life' experiences, particularly in the private sphere of personal relationships, an arena considered to be typically feminine. Highlighting the various areas or stages in private relationships covered in chick texts, paratexts present them as potentially informative and helpful to their audience. Thus, *The Trials of Tiffany Trott* emerges as a manual not only for women in their thirties to brave the modern dating 'jungle' but also for those who are likely to meet them and want to understand them. *I Don't Know How She Does It* is presented as

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<sup>5</sup> Individual publications' names are here given as they appear on chick texts' packaging.

the ultimate authority on working motherhood while *MLOP* is the perfect antidote to over-idealisation of the married state (Appendix 3). Paratextual rewritings embed chick texts in a wider discourse, a socially constructed knowledge of some aspects of reality about women's behaviour.

It could be suggested that sociological accuracy, reflected truth and female ordinariness are key-words in the paratexts of chick texts because chick texts appear to portray reality as journalists, reviewers, publishers, performers and novelists know it. As Millum argues,

media practitioners, spokesmen for the culture, tend to relay that version of the world which is most familiar to them [...]. A particular idea of what life is like is presented as if it were the only, or at least the best, way of life, [...] relayed and reinforced via the mass media to the rest of the population. (1975: 51-52)

If chick texts' writers (novelists, screenwriters and directors) and rewriters (reviewers and critics) belong to the same group of individuals, it is perhaps unsurprising that fictionalised autobiographical writing by someone working in the media about media circles is considered realistic by a fellow member of these circles. Chick texts could thus be defined as a peer-reviewed phenomenon whose success is partially due to a media hype created by their patrons and their peers: media professionals.

Although not all viewers and readers of chick texts can possibly belong to the same socio-economic and ethnic background as the protagonists, commentators are keen to point out that their response to chick texts was echoed by the public. The chick lit writer Colgan, for instance, describes the experience of reading *BJD* as 'an absolute revelation to see my life and confusion reflected in print [...] and clearly about one and a half million other people felt the same' (2001: 6). As Appendix 4 shows, individuals' response to chick texts can indeed be strikingly similar in tone and content to that of the press. The terms employed by readers of chick lit ('could relate to', 'real people', 'painfully accurate', 'recognisable', 'been there', 'identifiable', 'very similar to real women') indicate that they see very little difference between their reality and that of chick fiction. Like the press, reviewers on Amazon.co.uk also eagerly stress the universality of their identification with the characters. One

reviewer defines *MLOP* as ‘one for all your friends to borrow!’ while another mentions that she ‘lent it to all [her] friends who all felt exactly the same way’. Members of the public seem to have been influenced by the various paratextual rewritings of chick texts, notably those which explicitly encourage viewers and readers to recognise themselves in chick heroines. On the DVD cover of the first season of *SATC*, a quote from *Express on Sunday* reads ‘These four TV heroines are the very models of new millennium women...which one are you?’. This rhetorical question echoes the blurb of Green’s *Straight Talking*: ‘This could be about your best friend. Or your girlfriend. Or it might be about you. Are you Tasha – single and still searching? Are you one of her three best friends?’. As I will now explain, readers’ identification is also implicitly induced by the illustrated covers of chick lit novels.

As many have noted, chick lit covers are characterised by simplistically drawn and easily identifiable female individuals, silhouettes, metonymical body parts and accessories such as handbags, shopping bags, shoes and cocktail glasses (Mazza 2006: 18)(Mabry 2006: 194)<sup>6</sup>. It could be advanced that these simple cartoonish designs constitute a type of paratextual rewriting which aims to draw attention to the heroine’s ordinary and identifiable nature. In *Understanding Comics*, McCloud explains the popularity of cartoon characters:

When two people interact, they usually look directly at one another, seeing their partner’s features in vivid detail. Each one also sustains a constant awareness of his or her own face, but this mind-picture is not nearly so vivid; just a sketchy arrangement, a sense of shape, a sense of general placement. Something as simple and basic as a cartoon. Thus, when you look at a photo or a realistic drawing of a face, you see it as the face of another. But when you enter the world of the cartoon, you see yourself. I believe this is the primary cause of our childhood fascination with cartoons though other factors such as universal identification, simplicity and the childlike features of many cartoon characters also play a part. The cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled, an empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel into another realm. (1993: 35-36)

The cartoons on chick lit novels’ covers could be said to pull readers’ identity and awareness into the fictional character and the fictional setting she inhabits. Given that physical descriptions of heroines seem to be purposefully vague in chick lit (Whelehan 2002: 49), it is easy to see why a significant number of readers see their

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<sup>6</sup> With the notable exception of later reprints of adapted chick lit novels which tend to feature a picture of the screen adaptation’s actresses.

own selves and lives 'reflected' in chick lit novels: the covers require readers to actively imagine being the heroine. According to McCloud, the abstract lines of simplistic drawings require more cognitive and identifying efforts than photographs, which, in contrast, are merely received as pure visual input (1993: 49). The illustrated covers of chick lit appear to both reflect and reinforce the novels' appeal as books whose heroine could be any woman, including the female reader herself. The extent to which the publicity and the packaging of chick lit novels have influenced readers seems relatively evident in personal reviews which allude to the fact that a given character's 'relatable' nature was an established truth before reviewers even read the book. As one reader concludes about *BJD*, 'it is completely true that every woman can relate to her'.

Since not all members of chick texts' public can belong to the same milieu portrayed in chick texts, one is tempted to wonder what this public recognises in them. It could be advanced that public recognition is due to the growing erosion and blurring of distinction between the image and other orders of experience in this postmodern age (Fiske 1991: 58). As the public's defining sense of social reality is increasingly provided by the popular culture produced and distributed by the mass media (Strinati 2000: 231-232), readers and viewers of chick texts could be said to recognise the sense of female reality provided by the popular culture and produced and distributed by the mass media. As Colgan observes, 'popular novels reflect and are part of popular culture. So to expect young women to tell stories without mentioning the pressures of magazines, thinness, media celebrity and love that surround us would be extraordinary' (2001: 6). In other words, it is this cultural diet and its associated pressures which chick texts re-tell and women readers identify with. In Whelehan's words, 'Bridget Jones became a best-seller because women recognised within its irony their own experiences of popular culture' (2000: 152). More than being drawn to images of themselves and their existences *per se*, women readers and viewers are attracted to chick texts because they fictionally reproduce the images with which the mass media bombard them about themselves and their lives, as they are and/or should be (richer, thinner or smarter). Chick texts could be said to remediate these representations and articulate the anxieties they generate in women. Women working in the media, while contributing to these images, are evidently not immune to these



anxieties and compared to women working outside media circles, chick lit writers' position could be advanced to make them more exposed to and more aware of these stereotypes: in other words, more likely to re-tell them in a friendly, witty and socially observant manner. It is to the idea of chick texts and chick heroines as both companionable and humorous that I shall turn now.

### **3.2. Female Friendship and Humour**

A much promoted characteristic of chick texts is their comforting and friendly nature. For instance, Green's *Spellbound* is deemed 'to gratify even those with the most voracious of appetites for feel-good fiction' by the *Jewish Chronicle*<sup>7</sup> while *Jemima J* is as 'comforting as a bacon sandwich' according to *The Sunday Times*. A chick text is presented as having the ability to emulate conversations with friends: *The Daily Mail* finds that 'reading a new novel by Marian Keyes is like sitting at the kitchen table with your nicest most confiding friend' and Green's writing is viewed as 'the literary equivalent of an evening gossiping with your mates' by the magazine *Company*. A chick text reassures its audience 'read this and realise you're not alone' (*Essentials* about *Does My Bum Look Big in This?*) and this comforting sense of friendship is also found in personal reviews. On Amazon.co.uk, two readers go as far as stating about *MLOP*'s Clara: 'it was like I had a new friend' and 'I want her as a friend!'. According to an interviewed female fan of *AMB*, the series 'makes [viewers] feel not so 'alone'!' (Schroeter 2002). Jermyn's audience research on female viewers of *SATC* reveals similar contentions: the series is described as 'comforting [and] like being in a club' (2006: 206, 212). Chick characters therefore appear to possess characteristics of an individual with whom viewers and readers imagine they would have personal affinities. In her work on language and fiction, Talbot identifies two narrative practices which seem particularly relevant to this aspect of chick texts: the construction of an implied reader and first person narration. According to Talbot, every text has an imaginary addressee for whom the text was written (1995: 29). As she explains, the construction of an implied reader puts writers in a powerful position for they

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<sup>7</sup> Individual publications' names are here given as they appear on chick texts' packaging.

can assume all kinds of shared expectations, commonsense attitudes and even experiences. Actual readers in the target audience are likely to take up the subject position of the constructed implied reader [...]. Sometimes writers go to a great deal of trouble to give the impression of familiarity, even intimacy, with an audience of people who as individuals are in fact quite unknown to them. (1995: 29)

This impression of familiarity and closeness in chick texts has been noted by Philips who finds that the reader is often addressed in the language of female solidarity and camaraderie (2000: 247). Moreover, chick texts, be they novels, films or television series, tend to rely on first person narration, a technique which pushes their audience 'into subject positions identical to those of the narrator' (Talbot 1995: 30). As Whelehan observes about *BJD*, 'the confessional tone draws readers in, so that our relationship with Bridget is one of complicity, encouraging agreement with Bridget's world view' (2005: 180). Together, the construction of an addressee and the first person confessional narrative or voice-over appear to lead female viewers and readers of chick texts to sympathise and laugh with heroines, as they would with a friend.

The ability to make their audience laugh seems to be one of the most acclaimed features of chick texts. Reviewers tend to favour the 'adverb + funny' formula. *BJD* is presented as 'gloriously funny' by *The Sunday Times*. *MLOP* is 'brilliantly' and 'almost unbearably' funny according to *Vogue* and *New Statesman*. 'Laugh-out-loud' also appears repeatedly and is echoed in personal reviews where readers recall experiences of not being able to refrain from laughing on public transport. As Appendix 5 shows, it is not slapstick humour but observational cynicism and sharpness of chick texts' irony and humour that are hailed. Not only does the first person narration encourage the audience to join in the narrator's and the protagonists' laughter but the topics addressed are ones that are not traditionally dealt with in a comical manner: 'heartbreak, divorce, impotence, infertility and abortion' (Henry 2004: 69). As Henry notes about *SATC*, a sense of solidarity and an implicit feminism exude from the laughter shared between characters and viewers which is felt to escape male control (Ibid.). It is in this respect that chick texts seem to emulate key components of female friendships. Chick narrators offer the equivalent of 'catching up' with friends – a predominant reason for conversations amongst female friends (Coates 1996: 50) and the emphasis on personal relationships echoes an

important female conversational topic 'partners, children [and] friends' (Ibid.). This reinforces the public's empathy with characters and contributes to a feeling of mutual understanding essential to friendships. Validating women's experiences and feelings, chick texts appear to emulate not just female friendships but the most valuable type of female friendships: the ones where women's 'not nice' aspects (those which clash with their public persona) are mutually disclosed and accepted (Coates 1996: 24). This sense of 'warts and all' acceptance (Ibid.) imitates the way in which chick texts seem to provide validation and support about the 'things' which, according to reviewers, all women 'do' and 'think' but 'don't admit to' in public. The 'not nice' aspects of female characters and the acerbic 'not nice' laughter generated seem to have contributed to chick texts' success amongst viewers and readers. Carrie, Ally and Bridget appear to make a significant number of women laugh and feel less alone, and seem to be in their imagination much more real than mere fictional characters. The next section will specifically look at the way in which these heroines have achieved the status of representative characters and role models.

### **3.3. Representative Characters and Role Models**

Ally, Bridget and Carrie seem to have become representatives of modern womanhood in the popular imagination. Beyond promotional exposure of the films, novels and series, the fictional characters' names are recycled endlessly in the press and used as social prototypes. The heroine Ally McBeal is defined as 'an archetype of single womanhood' (Bellafante in Schroeter 2002) while Carrie, Charlotte, Samantha and Miranda are perceived to be 'representatives of this generation of women' (Henry 2004: 82). The character Bridget Jones is repeatedly linked to social trends. Watson sees her as the epitome of the 'Ballsy Singleton', a feminine identity which, 'pre-Bridget Jones, [...] you couldn't get away with' (2003: 30), suggesting that this fictional creation is to be thanked for the increasing social acceptance of female singledom. Clearly, the heroine has provided journalists new terms with which they can describe changes in society (Appendix 6). In an ironic development, Bridget's assumed inability to form a meaningful relationship with a member of the opposite sex now serves to depict the rise of male singledom (Appendix 6).

The name Bridget Jones is deemed capable of triggering a number of associations in an average newspaper reader's mind because she has become, like the heroines of *AMB* and *SATC*, what Leavy calls a 'representative character' (2006: 20). Drawing on both postmodernism and Baty's work on Marilyn Monroe to explain the cultural status of Ally McBeal, Leavy demonstrates how the heroine has functioned as a

representative character through whom to approach the political cultural condition of our time. Remembered as a product or story or some hybrid of the two, the representative character operates as a site on which American political culture is written and exchanged. The mass-mediated representative character operates as a figure through whom multiple meanings and references are remembered. (Ibid.)

Blurring the real and the imaged-imaginary, media discourses use fictional creations as vessels of cultural and social meanings. This not only affects the way in which society and culture are represented but as fiction blends with people's sense of socio-cultural reality, these representative characters are perceived as affecting society itself. Perceived social changes triggered by chick representative characters are both celebrated and denounced. For example, the series *SATC* is blamed for the increase of female credit-based personal consumption (Syson 2004: 109) as well as admired for the way in which the heroines' spending habits subvert the notion that female consumption should be family-oriented: 'if you'd rather spend money on handbags and spa breaks than kids, what's the shame in that? Look at Samantha in *SATC*. Go, girl!' (Watson 2003: 32). Whilst, as explained above, the name of Bridget Jones has been used to convey male singledom, the characters of *SATC*, Bridget's American fictional counterparts, are used to explain the rise of the male 'Bridget Jones': male singledom is deemed to be on the rise because men's potential partners 'are either binge drinkers or sexual predators. Bolstered by the role models of *SATC*, career women have wised up' (Cochrane 2004: 16). This sexual assertiveness which the series *SATC* has allegedly instilled into professional women is mainly due to the character Samantha Jones. In the media, Samantha seems to be both a feared and followed example of female sexual assurance and promiscuity. Her aggressiveness has raised 'anxiety about the show's potential to cause some kind of troubling, real-world epidemic' (Siegel 2002: 11), particularly amongst male critics who appear disturbed by the series's portrayal of female sexual gratification (Siegel 2002: 31)(Dreher 2003). Yet, these characteristics are precisely those encouraged by

women's magazines. An article entitled 'Discover Your Inner Sex Goddess' asks 'can you find the 'Samantha Jones' inside you?' and reminds readers that 'SATC star Kim Cattrall oozes sexual confidence, not only in her character in the television programme but in real life also' (Dooley 2005: 32). Actresses realise and relish the impact their role has had on real women: Cattrall 'never tire[s] of women coming up [to her] and saying 'you've affected my life'' (Williams 2002: 19).

Promoted, packaged and composed so as to encourage women's identification, chick texts seem to have had an impact on the representation of 'real' women in the media. Patrons, reviewers and consumers of chick texts seem to have created a significant interplay between reality and fiction, thus reflecting and reinforcing the appeal of chick texts to a female audience. As the following section will demonstrate, chick texts' popularity amongst female viewers and readers also seems to be due to the texts' ability to remediate and combine a significant number of women-oriented generic forms and differing ideological values, thus satisfying the tastes and expectations of a large section of the female public. As poetics and ideology seem to be intrinsically related, the following section will examine chick texts' generic hybridity and ideological complexity in the light of Fiske's theory of ideology in popular culture.

## **4. Poetics and Ideology in Chick Texts**

### **4.1. Ideology in Popular Culture**

In *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction*, Jean Radford offers an analysis of the status of the popular arts as degraded and naïve forms of the fine arts (1986: 2). She shows that, whilst analyses in the 1960s and 1970s broke ground in establishing popular culture as a worthy area of academic research, these new studies contributed to a redefinition of 'Literature' and popular fiction in relation to ideology (Radford 1986: 6). According to this redefinition, literature is seen to produce a 'knowledge' of ideology and to have a transformative effect on it (Ibid.). In contrast, popular fiction is understood to merely reproduce and transmit ideology (Ibid.). Literature is thus believed to possess sufficient powers to deconstruct the ideological

while popular fiction is seen as a disempowered cultural form which uniformly and unambiguously naturalises the dominant ideological discourses it contains. As Radford argues, these more recent critiques have corroborated the distinctions established by traditional literary criticism: the same texts are approved, but for different reasons, and the rest – lumped together as residue – disapproved (Ibid.). The same obsessive concern with value remains and non-canonical texts are collapsed back into their conditions of production (Radford 1986: 7).

As Fiske explains in *Understanding Popular Culture*, an alternative approach has developed in reaction to the one outlined by Radford: one which celebrates rather than disapproves of popular culture (2004: 20). This ‘celebratory’ model rejects the definition of popular culture as imposed upon ideologically passive and helpless people (Ibid.). The two types of academic readings seemed to align themselves on either side of the binary opposition which Hall describes as ‘the people versus the power bloc’ (in Fiske 2004: 28). As Fiske demonstrates, the main limitations of both approaches lie in the way in which they locate popular culture in relation to power: the celebratory approach fails to situate popular culture within a model of power whilst the other approach locates popular culture so firmly within a model of power that only the forces of domination prevail and the idea of popular culture as a culture *of the people* is impossible (Ibid.). Fiske proposes a third approach: an understanding of popular culture as a culture *of the people* and part of power relations between domination and subordination (2004: 18-21).

Fiske locates popular culture at the interface of the industries’ offer and what people make of it in their everyday life (2004: 29). He distinguishes between mass culture – the repertoire of cultural forms and commodities produced by capitalist patriarchal industries – and popular culture – the forms and commodities selected and used by the people (2004: 27-28). He gives the example of jeans which can and have been bleached and ripped by the people as a form of resistance: the industry responded by putting bleached and torn jeans on the market (2004: 29). Fiske sees the incorporation of torn and bleached jeans by the clothing industries as a typical ‘strategy of containment’ (Ibid.). He views ‘the people’ not as a stable monolithic category but as a shifting set of allegiances who select and make certain texts into

popular culture on the basis of their immediate social relevance (2004: 24-25). As Fiske and others note, mass production and marketing does not guarantee popularity as most cultural products fail to make a profit or indeed to recover their costs (Fiske 1987: 313)(Frith 1996: 161). To Fiske, the conception of popular culture as a capitalist and patriarchal homogenising force is skewed for it does not take into account that capitalism needs diversity or at least a 'controlled' type of diversity (2004: 29). Although social diversity will always exceed that required by capitalist, patriarchal, racial and heterosexual dominance, it is not in the cultural industries' interest to completely overlook diversity, for in order to be made into popular culture, a text must contain both the forces of domination and the opportunities to oppose them from subordinated, but not totally disempowered, positions (Fiske 2004: 25-29). The increasing centrality of identity politics and issues of media representations made strategies of containment particularly common in the 1980s and 1990s giving rise to what Klein calls 'identity marketing' (Klein 2001: 110-118). As Klein shows, corporations adopted the theme of diversity to market themselves to the youth demographic and accommodate the new generation's pluralistic attitudes and alternative lifestyles (Ibid.). Rhetorical variations on the themes of racial equality, gender fluidity and gay pride began to appear in advertising campaigns: people who saw themselves as belonging to oppressed groups had become ready-made market niches (Klein 2001: 112-113). Whilst these may be viewed as cynical recuperations, the incorporation of identity politics into marketing may also be seen as beneficial in the long term: previously unacceptable or invisible identities and ideologies are gaining positive visibility and more members of subordinate groups are employed by the cultural industries and have the opportunity to change the system from within (Klein 2001: 115).

In many ways, the incorporation of identity politics by the marketing industries is what Fiske would call an erosion of the dominant ideology of patriarchal capitalism. Drawing upon de Certeau's military metaphor, Fiske indeed advances that popular culture is a site of ideological struggle

between power and various forms of resistance to it or evasions of it, between military strategy and guerilla tactics. Evaluating the balance of power within this struggle is never easy: Who can say, at any one point, who is 'winning' a guerrilla war? The essence of guerrilla warfare, as of popular culture, lies in not

being defeatable. Despite nearly two centuries of capitalism, subordinated subcultures exist and intransigently refuse finally to be incorporated [...]. Despite many more centuries of patriarchy, women have produced and maintained a feminist movement, and individual women, in their everyday, constantly make guerrilla raids upon patriarchy, win small, fleeting victories, keep the enemy constantly on the alert, and gain, and sometimes hold, pieces of territory (however small) for themselves. And gradually, reluctantly, patriarchy has to change in response. Structural changes at the level of the system itself, in whatever domain – that of law, of politics, of industry, of the family – occur only after the system has been eroded and weakened by the tactics of everyday life. (2004: 19-20)

In the light of Fiske's theory, this section will not aim to determine the ideological victor in chick lit, flicks and television series but will instead give an overview of these texts as popular cultural forms containing and furthering both oppressive and subversive ideologies. For this purpose, the following two sections will explore the way in which chick texts draw on previous poetics and will be structured around the two broadly defined aforementioned ideological agendas. This is not, of course, to suggest that generic forms can either belong to one ideological faction or its ideological adversary. As I will show, some forms, such as the romance and the women's magazine seem to have historically oscillated between the two camps. However, as will become evident in section 4.3., academic responses to chick texts have tended to follow the aforementioned 'people versus power bloc' opposition, reviving the polarised dilemma of feminist academia as regards women-oriented popular cultural forms: should one celebrate them on the grounds of their underdog status or should they be demonised for their patriarchal constructions of femininity? (Garrett 2007: 58-61). In order to support their positions, opponents and proponents<sup>8</sup> have explored particular aspects of chick texts by drawing attention to the conservative or potentially subversive genres they have perceived chick texts to remediate. Before turning to the academic debate itself, the following section gives a detailed account of chick texts' relationship to these previous women-oriented forms.

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<sup>8</sup> Nowhere are polarised positions more evident than in some titles given to articles on *AMB*, which while playing on the series's status as a legal dramedy (Watson 2006: 2), also reveal the authors' self-appointed positions as either the prosecution 'Putting Ally on Trial' (Vavrus 2000), 'The Case Against Ally McBeal' (Hammers 2005) or the defence 'In Ms McBeal's Defense' (Lotz 2006).



## **4.2. Preceding Poetics**

### **4.2.1. Conservative Genres**

This section focuses on chick texts and what has been repeatedly viewed as their generic ancestors: romances and women's magazines. Though ideological subversion is not entirely absent from these two genres, the emphasis will be on the potentially conservative practices associated with romantic fiction and women's glossies which can be linked to the production, distribution and marketing of chick texts.

#### **4.2.1.1. Mass-Produced Romances**

Chick texts initially emerged as an identifiable phenomenon in publishing, an industry which, until recently, conceived each book 'as an individual product, so the promotion is unlikely to stimulate purchases of other books, with the exception perhaps, of books by the same author' (Paizis 1998: 2). Yet, in the promotion of a chick lit novel, its similarity to earlier bestsellers prevails over its uniqueness. This marketing technique is typical of popular literature and notably of mass-produced romantic literature published by Mills and Boon and Harlequin Enterprises. The idea behind these publishers' sales campaigns is that 'books do not necessarily have to be thought of and marketed as unique objects but can be sold regularly and repetitively to a permanent audience on the basis of brand-name identification alone' (Radway 1984: 39).

An analysis of paratexts reveals that in the case of chick texts, and particularly chick lit, the brand-name is *BJD*. On the internet, *BJD* regularly features at the top of amazon.com customers' reading lists or on the homepage of websites devoted to chick lit. One could thus read on the now defunct website [www.chiklit.us](http://www.chiklit.us): 'If you loved *BJD*, you'll flip over our line-up of the very best of British Chick Lit!'. References to Fielding's novel and central character also abound in the blurbs of chick lit books (Appendix 7). Although Clara's married status in *MLOP* distinguishes her from the singletons who normally populate chick texts, the protagonist was still hailed as 'the Bridget Jones of the twenty-first century' (Appendix 7). The parallel between Clara and other chick heroines is taken further in disturbingly similar reviews: 'Clara Hutt could eat Bridget Jones for breakfast. Actually, she'd be looking around for seconds before she'd finished' (*Evening*

*Standard*); ‘Clara [...] would eat Ally McBeal, on brioche, for breakfast’ (*The Times*). References to chick texts seem interchangeable in the promotion of newer chick texts. For instance, while *Milkrun*’s heroine is presented as a potential friend of Bridget Jones (Appendix 7), *Milkrun*’s plot itself is described as a ‘SATC-style story’ by *Heat*. The SATC label figures in the paratexts of *TDWP* described as ‘Sassy, insightful and sooo SATC’ by *Company* and as a ‘little gem [which] mixes SATC charm with dry New York wit’ by *Real*. Tellingly, such reviews often fail to specify whether they refer to the novel or the series SATC. As mentioned earlier, the British cover of Bushnell’s SATC bears the ‘read and approved’ chick lit stamp: a review by ‘Helen Fielding, author of BRIDGET JONES’S DIARY’ (original capitals): ‘Intriguing and highly entertaining’. A chick lit novel thus emerges as ‘an endlessly replicable commodity’ (Radway 1984: 29) in a way which singularly echoes the production, distribution and marketing of Harlequin’s romantic novels. Moreover, another regular label used to promote a chick text reinforces the phenomenon’s connection to romance: the name of Jane Austen.

Helen Fielding openly acknowledges Jane Austen’s influence on her writing, going as far as claiming she stole the plot from *Pride and Prejudice* on the grounds that ‘it had been very well market-researched over a number of centuries’ (in Whelehan 2002: 30). This admission highlights *BJD* and other chick lit novels’ status as romantic fictions. As has been frequently noted, Bridget’s love interest and the eventual romantic hero has the same surname as *Pride and Prejudice*’s Fitzwilliam Darcy (Whelehan 2002: 34)(Salber 2001). The relationship between the two fictional male characters was made visually obvious in the 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* and the film versions of *BJD*: both Darcys were played by English actor Colin Firth. Jane Austen’s novel provided Helen Fielding not only with a model for her romantic plot but also with the opportunity to take intertextuality to another level: Bridget and her friends are fans of the BBC adaptation and in particular of Colin Firth (Salber 2001). Austen is retrospectively labelled as the original chick lit writer (Crusie and Yeffeth 2005) and is used not only in chick texts but in the paratexts of chick texts. SATC is described as ‘Jane Austen with a Martini’ by *The Sunday Telegraph*. Bushnell’s and Fielding’s novels thus emerge as modern rewritings of

Austen's novels, placing their texts and the cultural trend they set within the realm of romantic narratives.

Fielding's comment on Austen's 'very well market-researched' plot alludes to a fool-proof formula employed by publishing houses such as Harlequin whose sales of formulaic romances rely on precise market research and marketing techniques. According to Harlequin's president,

the qualities of the product itself are unimportant in designing sales campaigns. Of greater significance is the ability to identify an audience or consuming public, the discovery of a way to reach that audience, and, finally, the forging of an association in the consumer's mind between a generic product like soap, facial tissue, or romantic fiction and the company name through the mediation of a deliberately created image. (in Radway 1984: 40)

Publishers and sellers of chick lit novels seem to follow a similar approach to distribution and promotion. Repetitive blurbs aside, reaching a potential readership of chick lit visually involves colour-coded jackets. Chick lit novels' packaging is recognisable by its volume and uniformity: 'row upon row [...] glowing pinkly in shades from icing-sugar to raspberry' (Craig 2003: 1). Strategically located at the entrance or by supermarket check-outs (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 2006: 489)(Mabry 2006: 194) and displayed together so as to create a pink glow, chick lit novels are both extremely visible and accessible in the same way as mass-produced romantic fiction in retail stores (Radway 1984: 38). It was only a matter of time before Harlequin Enterprises launched its own chick lit subsidiary: Red Dress Ink<sup>9</sup>. With the creation of Red Dress Ink in 2001, Harlequin seems to have merely reclaimed a genre which has employed its marketing and distributing strategies to succeed. Red Dress Ink may strengthen the link between chick lit and mass-produced romances but the promotion and distribution of chick lit may also be reflective of changing attitudes in the publishing industry. As Radway explains, Harlequin's strategies have been used in other consumer-product industries for years and have only been considered unusual because they have been applied to bookselling (1984: 40). Writing in the mid-1980s, she notes that 'once ignored within the industry, Harlequin is now followed with care by book people who have little respect for the company's

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<sup>9</sup> See Craddock's 'Bridget Jones's Little Red Dress: chicklit, Mass-Market Popular Romance and Feminism' (2004: 42-50).

editorial product but would dearly love to duplicate its financial success' (1984: 41). Drawing on Harlequin's methods, more and more publishers treat books as commodities for which a particular image must be deliberately created and efficiently mediated in order to reach their target consumers. In the case of chick texts, the deliberately created image does not solely appear to be that of a romance and also seems to draw on an image already created in women's magazines: the desirable lifestyle. The following section explores this glossy image of consumerism and the connection between chick texts and women's magazines.

#### **4.2.1.2. Women's Magazines**

As Philips observes, chick lit is 'a genre that takes great pleasure in conspicuous consumption, and that plays with the opportunities afforded by the multiplication of goods for women who are in a position to afford them' (Philips 2000: 239). Similarly, Dorney defines chick texts as 'lifestyle' fictions and finds a hundred and eighty five brand-names in five chick lit novels alone (including *BJD* and *MLOP*) (2004: 11-21). She argues that these references constitute a cipher for lifestyle and function as signifiers, giving characters and plots credibility and eliciting readers' recognition (Dorney 2004: 14). Although readers' pleasure derives from 'deciphering' the characters' sophisticated and urban lifestyle code, they do not necessarily share a similar lifestyle. Recognition is possible because the public lives in a consumer society in which brand-names and advertising are omnipresent (Klein 2001: 3-124). As Klein argues, in this globalised world, the logo has become a common language understood by – if not accessible to – everyone (2001: 118-121). The presence of real brand-names reflects and reinforces the brand-names' roles as signifiers: brand information is often 'given' (Dorney 2004: 13) and not explicated: therefore presenting the possession and acquisition of certain products as unproblematically normal and natural.

Brand-names in chick texts seem a typical example of a common advertising strategy: product placement or 'the deliberate inclusion of branded products into an entertainment program aimed at influencing the audience' (Law and Braun-LaTour 2004: 63). This is confirmed by the fact that chick lit novels, series and films have generated sales of other commodities: self-help manuals (Whelehan 2002: 66), sex

toys (Arthurs 2003: 94), cocktails (Leupold 2003) and stilettos (König 2004: 140). Consumerism is particularly strong in *SATC: Kiss and Tell* (Sohn 2002) which primarily deals with the consumables, restaurants and bars appearing on the series. On a smaller scale, even the academic *Reading SATC* provides a list of addresses in Manhattan where characters are seen shopping, lunching or partying (Akass and McCabe 2004: 219-227). If chick texts appear to fictionally reproduce the discourse of female consumerism held by lifestyle magazines, this is because they are believed to address the same public as glossies: young women skilled in consumerist discourses who read lifestyle publications such as *ELLE*, *Marie-Claire*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour* (Philips 2000: 240)(Smith 2008: 9), a belief confirmed by the numerous reviews from glossies found in chick texts' paratexts (Appendix 8). In fact, chick texts and women's magazines seem to be reciprocal marketing devices. 'Free promotional copies' of chick lit novels are regularly used as incentives to purchase these lifestyle publications. Moreover, women's magazines being commodities and part of the media industry, they appear in chick texts either as characters' reading material (*BJD*, *SATC*) or their place of work (*TDWP*, *SATC*).

Chick texts' apparent celebration of female agency in consumption seems to derive from a 'feminine culture of consumerism and fashion [that is] considered as a source of pleasure and power [because it is] potentially resistant to male control' (Arthurs 2003: 87). This is particularly true of the series *SATC* where the heroines' taste in expensive footwear and garments is a way of 'putting on show their own spending power and independence' (Bruzzi and Church Gibson 2004: 127) and all the more plausible when one considers that Bushnell was a contributing editor at *Vogue*. König argues that the potential of the *SATC* heroines as promoters of certain labels and products has been fully exploited by the lifestyle press because they provided 'a far better showcase than any number of catwalk shows or advertising campaigns' (2004: 138). König explains that this is because the heroines' success, intelligence and interesting lives made them a more attractive editorial choice than unknown models (Ibid.) 'to persuade the most sceptical reader of the benefits of high-cost, directional fashion' (König 2004: 138). *SATC* thus exemplifies the significant and complex cross-over of content between chick texts and women's magazines. This

cross-over is perhaps better explained in the light of the lifestyle publication which bears the same name as the *SATC* heroines' favourite cocktail: *Cosmopolitan*.

*Cosmopolitan's* current format dates back to the mid-1960s when the magazine enlisted the help of best-selling author Helen Gurley Brown. In 1962, Helen Gurley Brown published *Sex and the Single Girl*, an instant bestseller which remained so until 1963. *Sex and the Single Girl* is essentially a self-help manual which, as Whelehan remarks, offered 'lifestyle' advice before the term had even entered common parlance (2005: 27). Brown's advice concerned love, sex and money and spoke to the expanding class of unmarried working women (Ouellette 1999: 362). Her success attracted the attention of Hearst Publications, owners of the then fledgling intellectual magazine *Cosmopolitan* (Ouellette 1999: 363). In 1965, Brown became the magazine's editor-in-chief, a position she held until 1997. Convinced that the magazine's plummeting sales resided in its inability to imagine its audience, Brown revamped *Cosmopolitan* so that it described and appealed to her best-seller's target demographic: young and single working women who have now become known as 'Cosmo' girls. The transformation of the failing magazine into 'a bible for young women who want to do better' (Whelehan 2002: 29) was hugely successful and set an unprecedented trend in the women-oriented magazine publishing industry (Ouellette 1999: 362)(Whelehan 2005: 28)(Smith 2008: 24-26). Brown's 'Cosmo Girl', a 'sexualized symbol of pink-collar femininity' (Ouellette 1999: 362), played a major part in the changing representation of women in popular culture and imagination. Although the ideal fictionalised Cosmo girl replaced the image of the spinster with 'a tornado of competence' (Israel in Smith 2008: 24), the reader is often addressed as a 'have not' whose singleness, incompetence and inadequacies could be remedied with specific instructions (Ibid.). Thus, the Cosmo girl offers a perpetual gap between the current inadequate self and the ideal future self and in doing so capitalises on female insecurities, an aspect of women's magazines which has triggered the most criticism (Ouellette 1999: 367).

It is in this respect that chick texts have been regularly linked to Helen Gurley Brown's *Cosmopolitan*. Whelehan defines Bridget as 'a direct descendant of Brown' (2002: 28) while the heroines of *SATC* and *AMB* are often seen to be updated

versions of the 'Cosmo' woman (Arthurs 2003: 87)(Siegel 2002: 7). As a result, chick texts have been perceived to provide an idealised representation of womanhood intrinsically linked to consumption. Bignell, for instance, finds that the pleasure derived from watching the series *SATC* is very similar to the pleasure derived from reading a glossy in that both pleasures constitute a 'medium through which [...] ideological meanings of femininity are passed on' (2004: 164). These meanings include self-adornment, self-improvement and a sense of collective feminine identity (Ibid.) which, whilst being temporarily enjoyable, perpetuate the terms of commodity consumption: female self-dissatisfaction and self-absorption (Bignell 2004: 165-167). Brunnemer also points to the visual aspects of *SATC*, the series's employment of 'all-white, all-rich, all-thin bodies' (2003: 13) and the camera shots which objectify and commodify the actresses in order to perpetuate a value rooted in women's magazine discourse: 'maintain a body worthy of being looked at' (Brunnemer 2003: 14). According to Arthurs, *SATC* not only presents a consumer lifestyle to be emulated by viewers but also dramatises the kind of relationship advice found in women's magazines, notably through the multiplicity of personal anecdotes used to exemplify a particular issue which viewers, like readers, are invited to weigh up (2003: 89-90). The consumerism typical of women's magazines can also fictionally manifest itself in peculiar ways in chick texts: chick heroines often treat male protagonists as consumer goods, deploying consumer skills to interpret a given man's desirability (Arthurs 2003: 94)(Philips 2000: 240).

Chick texts thus seem to make use of practices typical of the mass-produced romance and the women's magazine, two generic forms commonly associated with a female audience and oppressive patriarchal and capitalist ideologies of heterosexuality, femininity and consumerism<sup>10</sup>. Chick texts, glossies and romances appear to share important characteristics: produced, distributed and circulated in high numbers, they

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<sup>10</sup> Another cultural item there is no space to explore here is the Barbie doll, which like the Cosmo girl, teaches girls that 'their looks are central to their femininity as well as their desirability and worthiness' (Rogers 1999: 24). Historically, this 'plastic princess of conspicuous consumption' (Rogers 1999: 67) was created only a few years before Brown's Cosmo Girl. The various shades of pink and the simplistically drawn adornments on chick lit covers echo the doll's furniture, accessories and packaging in such a way that the target consumers of chick texts seem to have been identified as former Barbie players by marketing teams.

have all been dismissed as commercially motivated and culturally worthless and frivolous. Yet, as the next section shows, romances and women's magazines themselves have not always been perceived as solely patriarchal and consumerist and have been argued to contain some elements of subversion. Moreover, chick texts have also been seen to remediate certain generic forms with more established subversive credentials.

#### **4.2.2. Potentially Subversive Genres**

##### **4.2.2.1. Ideologically Complex Romances**

As has been mentioned, the intertextual relationship between Jane Austen's novels and chick lit has contributed to the definition of chick texts as primarily romantic. Yet, chick lit and Austen's novels seem to have more in common than romantic plots: they are both heroine-centred and woman-penned (Smith 2008: 7), they focus on women's daily lives (Robinson in Ferriss 2006: 76)(Wells 2006: 63), synthesise diverse popular and literary forms (Harzewski 2006: 41) and make use of irony (Wells 2006: 64) and social observation (Whelehan 2005: 185) to depict the rituals of contemporary courtship and the perils facing single women (Ferriss 2006: 72). The identification of Austen's novels as chick texts' generic predecessors is significant: not only did Austen historically contribute to the legitimisation of female novelists (Spencer 1986: 167) but her writing and notably its comic aspects have been perceived as subversive and feminist (Bilger 1998: 67-75, 120-142)(Castellanos 1994)(Kirkham 1997: 81-160).

Austen's novels are not the only romantic predecessors of chick texts to mix different and potentially conflicting ideologies. Harzewski, for instance, observes that the realist urban and professional setting of chick lit draws upon and amplifies the 'workplace' décor found in Harlequin 'career romances' in the late 1970s (2006: 39-40). In this respect, career chicks could be said to be the updated version of the career romantic heroines described by Rabine (1985: 167-170). Female independence and work also existed in mass-market romantic fiction before the 1970s. After WWI, the heroines populating romances start to show a level of sophistication reflective of the 'new' society and the gay young things of the interwar period (Makinen 2001: 26). While much of the literature of the day rarely addresses



women's changing social, political and professional roles, novels by Netta Muskett, Berta Ruck, Denise Robins and Ruby M. Ayres are amongst the first to reflect their female readership's concern with work and independence and to present female autonomy as desirable and glamorous (Ibid.). Their novels feature a 'new' heroine who

lived in Mayfair, smoked cigarettes and drank cocktails. By the mid-1930s, she was also economically independent for the first time, usually working in something creative or fashion-oriented, with a busy nightlife crammed with cocktail parties, night-clubs and West End shows. (Ibid.)

This partying heroine resembles the figure of the 'flapper' and leads a lifestyle strikingly similar to that of chick characters. Interestingly, WWII does not put an end to this development in romantic heroines. Indeed, despite Anglo-American media and governmental efforts to encourage women to return to the home, positive representations of single – and married – working women continue to be found in British and American romances of the time. Working heroines are particularly present in novels by Jane Arbor, Barbara Stanton and Eleanor Farnes (Dixon 1999: 120-126) who 'emphasize the importance of gainful employment to women, following the interwar feminist ideology of equality, and argue passionately for a woman's right to work in a job she enjoys' (Dixon 1999: 121).

This tendency continues in the 1960s when working heroines become a staple of romantic novels, reflecting the growing social expectation that a single woman ought to work, generally in a service capacity (Dixon 1999: 128). This gradually changes in the 1970s and by the early-to-mid 1980s, romantic heroines start pursuing careers which 'go beyond the wildest dreams of the most ambitious contemporary career woman' (Rabine 1985: 167). Second Wave Feminism also begins to trickle down to mass-market romantic fiction. Analysing a sample of sixteen romantic novels published between 1983 and 1984, Jones finds that each

either refers explicitly to feminism or deals implicitly with issues feminism has raised: women's work, their economic and psychic independence from men, their sexuality – or what might be better called the shifts in 'manners' around heterosexual attraction and pursuit. (1985: 197)

Jones shows that the insertion of feminist values in these novels is not always smooth or logical but that their presence showed ‘signs of life stirring (up?) in an ancient literary mode’ (1985: 216). The textual co-existence of feminist and patriarchal ideologies and the tensions and contradictions it creates are therefore not a novelty in the romantic genre and one could relate this to Fiske’s notion that texts need to contain the means to oppose the dominant ideological discourse in order to be popular. As the next section will develop, the women’s magazine – the other feminine cultural form to which chick texts have been linked – presents similar ideological tensions and contradictions. These tensions and contradictions will be explored in further detail in the light of the complex relationship between political feminism and the model for current women’s glossies: *Cosmopolitan*.

#### **4.2.2.2. Ideologically Complex Magazines**

Although Brown’s Cosmo Girl provides an ideal of femininity against which female readers can measure themselves and their inadequacies, the former editor of *Cosmopolitan* could also be credited for having contributed to a number of aspects of women’s emancipation. The first area of women’s lives which Brown seems to have impacted upon is sexuality. By promoting pre-marital sex and birth control, she is one of the first mainstream figures to have encouraged women to disregard the patriarchal double standard (Whelehan 2005: 26-29)(Ouellette 1999: 361). Even though Brown is not radically against marriage or children, she questions the normal economy of heterosexual relations of her time, condones divorce, critiques mandatory motherhood and matrimony and advises her readers to work outside the home and have children later in life (Whelehan 2005: 29)(Ouellette 1999: 361). In many ways, Brown has been a key figure in women’s sexual emancipation (Ouellette 1999: 360-361).

Although Brown’s advocacy of sexuality and sex appeal as a route to female empowerment seems to have furthered the sexual objectification of women and thus women’s oppression, her message about femininity could paradoxically be considered to be potentially subversive. Indeed, by imagining the ideal single girl as an artist whose most treasured creation is herself (Whelehan 2005: 27), Brown ‘celebrated an exaggerated femininity that hinged on the transformative power of

artifice' (Ouellette 1999: 365). As Whelehan argues, Brown's regimen exploded the patriarchal myth of natural feminine beauty (2005: 27). To an extent, the hyper-feminine Cosmo Girl presents the ideal woman as a construct and a masquerade and in doing so, defines womanhood as a created performance rather than an essence. Like the female impersonator, the Cosmo Girl 'denaturalises ideology by calling attention to the conventions that encode her as a woman; she repeats femininity with a playful difference that is a critical difference, producing knowledge about it: that it is a role and not a nature'<sup>11</sup> (Tyler 2003: 38). Tyler suggests that although 'doing' ideology appears more likely to confirm than contest it, the hyper-feminine woman, by excessively 'doing' patriarchal femininity 'contests femininity through femininity, deconstructing that patriarchal discourse from within (rather than transcending it)' (2003: 34-38). This subversion of ideology from within echoes Brown's project. As Whelehan notes, Brown regards herself as a feminist for she understands feminism to be about individual female empowerment (2005: 30). Brown offers what she sees as a pragmatic solution to improve the lot of women stuck at the bottom of the economic ladder (Ouellette 1999: 367, 372): exploit one's own best assets and work hard within the system, around men – rather than against them (Whelehan 2005: 29-30). Based on the acceptance that one lives in a male-dominated world, Brown's advice implies that one could still fight against the odds and succeed within it (Whelehan 2005: 33). Although Betty Friedan reportedly defined Brown's brand of feminism as 'obscene and horrible' (in Ouellette 1999: 361) and although *The Feminine Mystique* addressed a different class and type of women<sup>12</sup>, Whelehan considers that there are similarities between the two authors: both explored the realities of patriarchy and women's place within it, both use personal testimony to illustrate their arguments and both emphasise individual over and above collective action (Whelehan 2005: 36). Whilst the mainstream media may have amplified their

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<sup>11</sup> Brown does not seem to have ever explicitly acknowledged the influence of de Beauvoir's 'One is not born a woman. One becomes a woman' on her ethos and preferred to highlight her childhood during which the death of her father (whom she describes as a 'chauvinist') enabled her mother to return to work and foster high professional and social ambitions in her eldest daughter (in Baumgardner and Richards 2000: 154). Yet, it is perhaps not incidental that she was mocked as the 'working girl's Simone de Beauvoir' by her critics (in Ouellette 1999: 363).

<sup>12</sup> Insofar as Brown addressed a non-intellectual working-class and single female readership (Ouellette 1999: 368-369) while Friedan spoke to middle-class university-educated mothers (Whelehan 2005: 31).

differences for sensational purposes, other accounts actually suggest that the two women are friends (Ibid.).

Last but not least, Brown's *Cosmopolitan* is the first magazine to address self-sufficient working women (Ouellette 1999: 362). In celebrating the relative freedoms of the modern career girl, Brown has irrevocably changed young women's professional and social expectations (Whelehan 2005: 28-29). Her editorship has reflected and reinforced the emergence of the career-oriented woman as a legitimate cultural figure, herself a product of women's increased access to education, a buoyant post-war economy and a changing ideology of femininity (Whelehan 2005: 141). In many ways, Brown's model of sexually autonomous and professionally driven femininity prepared the ground for chick texts' other predecessors: sexually subversive non-fictions, consciousness raising novels and the 'superwoman' genre.

#### **4.2.2.3. Sexually Subversive Non-Fiction**

Brown has not solely encouraged women to view themselves as sexual beings outside their normative roles of wives and mothers; she has also run features on surprisingly forthright themes for her time: female orgasms, masturbation, casual sex and sexual experimentation (Ouellette 1999: 370). In this respect, the editorial content of *Cosmopolitan* has resembled early Second Wave feminist writing on female sexuality such as *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, which like *Cosmopolitan*, has legitimised the idea of female sexual agency and women's equal right to sexual pleasure (Henry 2004: 77). Henry finds two important parallels between the series *SATC* and *Our Bodies, Ourselves*: an insistence on female orgasm as a fundamental part of intercourse and the central role of the clitoris in female sexual pleasure (2004: 76-77). Focusing on practices such as cunnilingus and masturbation, *SATC* participates in a re-installation of the clitoris as a symbol of female potency and a distinctively feminist body part (Henry 2004: 77). One could also establish a connection between *SATC*'s (and other chick texts') portrayal of female sexuality and other sexually subversive texts: Nancy Friday's *My Secret Garden* which explored women's sexual fantasies and *The Hite Report* which aimed to bust common patriarchal myths about women's sexual behaviour. In the English-speaking world, these texts have opened a culturally legitimate space within which women

could speak to other women about sex (Hawke 1996: 112). This autonomous feminine sexual space led to a multitude of similar publications in the last forty years. Authors include Wendy Maltz, Lisa Sussman, J.K. Collins and Rachel Silver. One of the most recent books of this type, Livoti and Topp's *Vaginas, an Owner's Manual* (2005) inscribes *SATC* in this tradition of sexually explicit and subversive women-oriented non-fictions by bearing a review by 'Candace Bushnell, author of *SATC*: "This is a book every woman should own"'. Chick texts can also be productively compared to another type of sexually subversive and feminist writing: the Consciousness Raising (CR) genre of the 1970s and early 1980s.

#### **4.2.2.4. The Consciousness Raising Genre**

Whelehan identifies several connections and similarities between chick lit and novels by Second Wave feminist authors such as Mae Rita Brown, Lisa Alther, Dorothy Ballantyne, Erica Jong and Marilyn French. At the level of reception, Whelehan remarks that both CR novels and chick lit have been perceived to capture the female 'zeitgeist' of their respective time and much has been made about the similarities between authors and heroines (2005: 174). Whelehan also notes that in the same way as CR novels addressed

a generation of women who had felt the stirrings of the Women's Liberation Movement even if they were not themselves active in it, [chick lit] addresses a constituency of women whose politics (if they have any) are played against the increasingly intrusive presence of the media. (2005: 184)

Whelehan also shows that, textually, both the CR genre and chick lit address interrelated themes: female self-identity, female power and sexual relationships (2005: 218). Both genres employ observational humour (2005: 176, 209), demonstrate a painful awareness of the constructedness of female identity (2005: 72), feature heroines who display a continued belief in the possibility of love between the sexes (2005: 204) and use the confessional mode to 'expose the underside of women's lives and to explore the realities of what had too often been dismissed as trivial and unremarkable' (2005: 215). These similarities lead Whelehan to argue that both genres are 'a testament to the fact that the woman question continues to be asked' (Whelehan 2005: 205). According to Whelehan, chick texts engage with Second Wave Feminism and one of its most problematic conceptual gaps, a

conceptual gap which seems to have only been previously explored by CR novels: the reconciliation of one's feminist politics with personal emotions tied to patriarchal ideology – namely, romantic love and heterosexual desire (2005: 205-206). As Whelehan highlights, Second Wave Feminism does not seem to have produced a positive ideal of female heterosexuality, struggling between the need to expose women's oppression in their most intimate relationships and the pursuit of a new form of sexual engagement, powerful enough to depose normative heterosexuality (2005: 132). The alternatives which emerged (political lesbianism, deliberate celibacy or unspoken heterosexuality) and the potential disagreements and split these alternatives could trigger led to a cautious and ambiguous silence (Ibid.). In Whelehan's words: 'feminists became more circumspect about how women were expected to express themselves sexually and to what extent one's politics should inform one's sexual choices' (2005: 133). As she observes, this prudence was particularly confusing to the majority of women on the periphery of the movement who were attracted to the idea that 'the personal is the political' but found no practical guidance (Ibid.). This confusion, Whelehan advances, is still palpable in chick lit novels today (2005: 185).

Whelehan does not explore the relationship between CR novels and chick lit beyond their respective mainstream reception and textual content and there may have been too few academic responses to chick texts at the time of her writing to prompt a comparison between feminist readings of CR novels and feminist readings of chick texts. Yet, her account of feminist responses to the CR genre and its authors could be compared to some of the critiques of chick texts which I will discuss in section 4.3. As Whelehan explains, feminist academics have displayed a marked distrust towards CR novels and novelists (2005: 97-118). Individual authors and their writing have been analysed as though they were directly answerable to the women's movement. In a way which singularly echoes some approaches to chick texts, many critics have tended to 'hold [CR novelists] up to trial to examine the purity of their intentions [and the] authenticity of feminist motive' (Whelehan 2005: 104). As Whelehan notes, three interrelated tendencies characterise these responses: a reluctance to engage with the texts as works of fiction, an implication that novels engaging with feminism ought to contain as much feminism as feminist political tracts, and the

invisible presence of a 'pure' feminist text functioning as a yardstick against which the feminist credentials of women-oriented fiction can be assessed (Whelehan 2005: 104-106). As Whelehan observes, exposing and questioning the reality of patriarchy and gender relations have been perceived as insufficient, as though a feminist novel should not feature torn and frustrated heroines (2005: 106, 112). In other words, the ideal feminist heroine is a 'superwoman', cleansed of all conflict (Jong in Whelehan 2005: 112). Ironically, this 'superwoman' began to emerge in popular literature in the early 1980s but in texts which would also only partially qualify as feminist: the 'superwoman' bonkbusters. The next section explores these 'superwoman' novels and their relationship to chick texts.

#### **4.2.2.5. The 'Superwoman' Genre**

'Superwoman' novels – also known as 'sex and shopping' or 'money, sex and power' novels (Whelehan 2005: 144, 153) – can be defined as narratives featuring 'a glamorous, ambitious heroine who fights her way to the top of a corporate empire while engaging in conspicuous consumption of men and designer labels' (Felski in Whelehan 2005: 144). As Whelehan observes, the consumerist fantasies of the 'superwoman' genre seem to have provided an escapist antidote to the realistic confessions of the CR genre (2005: 153). To an extent, the realistic confessions of chick texts could themselves be considered to be a reaction to the escapist dreams of female power and competence found in 'superwoman' novels (Whelehan 2005: 155, 203). Although chick texts' empathetic realism does depart from the 'superwoman' novel, most chick lit novels appear to achieve a balance between repetitive mundanity and aspirational glamour, thus drawing on CR and 'superwoman' novels simultaneously (Whelehan 2005: 201). Whelehan notes that 'superwoman' novels prefigure the substance of chick texts in three different ways: 'superwoman' heroines often have careers in advertising or the entertainment media, they lead autonomous lives without a man and they may form a relationship with an economically and/or socially inferior male partner (Whelehan 2005: 151-152).

'Superwoman' novels also seem to be ideologically contradictory: their portrayal of self-made women's successes in the public sphere at the expense of their personal lives could define them as politically conservative (Whelehan 2005: 148-151). Yet,

despite this conservatism, the ‘superwoman’ genre also contains a number of potentially subversive elements: it celebrates female desire for power and the power of female desire (Felski in Whelehan 2005: 154); its representation of active female sexuality challenges the exclusively male gaze of patriarchal structures (Lewallen in Whelehan 2005: 151); and it relegates the private sphere to the background and places female accomplishment in the public sphere in the foreground (Whelehan 2005: 151). Furthermore, the sheer self-determination of ‘superwoman’ heroines enables female readers to think that they may not be able to change the world, but they are powerful enough to change their own lives and the male-dominated world of business (Whelehan 2005: 151-155). If the relationship between the ‘superwoman’ novels and feminism (both as a movement and an ideology) appears tenuous, it could be argued that, like chick texts, these novels could not have existed without Second Wave Feminism (Felski in Whelehan 2005: 154). As I will show in the next section, a similar argument could be made about the three sitcoms which have been seen as the predecessors of chick television series: *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Designing Women* and *Murphy Brown*.

#### **4.2.2.6. The Heroine-Centred Sitcom**

*The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977) (hereafter *MTM*) was the first television series to focus on a single working woman (Mary Richards) and has been repeatedly seen as the televisual ancestor of both *AMB* and *SATC* (Payson 2006: 10)(Akass and McCabe 2004: 12)(Hammers 2006: 89-90)(Lotz 2006: 142). One of *MTM*’s most evident legacies on chick series has been its innovative substitution of the sitcom’s traditional family structure with female friendships and sisterhood (Grochowski 2004: 158). As Mary Richards’s televisual descendants, heroines of chick television series have been seen to belong to the generation of women who watched the series as children and thus saw Mary Richards’s autonomy and promiscuity as legitimately feminine (Nelson 2004: 86).

*AMB* and *SATC* have also been linked to two other American female-centred sitcoms which directly follow in the footsteps of *MTM*: *Designing Women* (1986-1993) and *Murphy Brown* (1988-1998) (Nelson 2004: 87)(Leavy 2006: 24)(Henry 2004: 66-70). *Designing Women* is a sitcom about a close-knit group of five women working



in a design firm (Dow 1996: 106-107). Like chick texts, one of the greatest appeals of both *MTM* and *Designing Women* has been in their realist foregrounding of female communities and interaction (Dow 1996: 45-48, 105). *Murphy Brown* shares important characteristics with *MTM* and *Designing Women* which are particularly relevant to the three series' status as chick texts' predecessors. Like its predecessors, *Murphy Brown* follows the life of an eponymous professional female (Dow 1996: 136). However, unlike Mary Richards, Murphy Brown is not merely working in a local news station, she is a network co-anchor of prime-time news (Ibid.). This difference may be due to the fact that, like *Designing Women*, *Murphy Brown* was the product of a growing minority of female producers and writers in the 1980s (Dow 1996: 135). Like chick texts, these two series were thus reflective of the increasing feminisation of the media (discussed in section 2.3.). Unsurprisingly, these female-centred, female-authored and female-oriented sitcoms have used motifs and explored themes which would later be reprised by chick television series: the female ensemble in which each heroine represents an archetype of contemporary femininity (Henry 2004: 66); the shifting boundaries of a single woman's acceptable behaviour, notably the legitimacy of single motherhood (Nelson 2004: 87); the notion of female self-sufficiency (Leavy 2006: 24); professional women's concerns in the workplace (Ibid.); and female sexuality (including homosexuality) (Merck 2004: 53). Drawing upon Dow's work on these sitcoms and their engagement with the women's liberation movement, Henry shows that the series *SATC* addresses similar feminist issues and thus, like the aforementioned sitcoms, *SATC* participates in the redefinition of womanhood and feminism, one which reflects the series's particular socio-cultural and political climate (2004: 69). As Henry (2004: 69-70) and Dow (1996: xxiii) both argue, this is why televisual representations of feminism continue to be filtered through white, middle-class and heterosexual heroines: not only have the experiences of white, heterosexual and middle-class women dominated Second Wave Feminism (although not without contestation), but hegemonic Americanness itself as well as the assumed target audience of these series remain defined by whiteness, middle-classness and heterosexuality. As the next section shows, this has been seen to limit the subversive potential of chick texts' representation of femininity.

Chick texts thus appear to combine a number of poetological traditions and conflicting ideologies. Fiske's theory of ideology in popular culture helps make sense of this contradictory co-presence of genres and discourses: chick texts, while replicating poetological elements of genres associated with women's oppression, also draw on more subversive women-oriented genres because, in order to be made into popular culture by women, chick texts have needed to contain the means to oppose the dominant discourses of patriarchy and capitalism. While the mass-production, distribution and product placements are evident signs of the well-orchestrated methods of the dominant powers, chick texts have still needed to take into account Second Wave Feminism's impact on women's lives and to allow for a certain type of representation of womanhood. This modern liberated femininity may be limited and controlled by the wider needs of the dominant forces but it cannot be entirely disempowered.

Viewing chick texts as a site of ideological struggle enables one not only to make sense of their generic hybridity and ideological complexity but also helps shed light on the current debate about the presence and significance of subversive elements in chick texts. With the exception of Leavy (2006), few academic observers have resorted to Fiske's approach to popular culture. This has resulted in a variety of ambivalent and frequently conflicting conclusions as regards chick texts' representation of modern femininity in the public and the private spheres.

#### **4.3. Modern Femininity?**

This section gives an overview of the numerous academic positions on the presence and significance of subversive elements in chick texts. The wide range of interpretations chick texts have inspired seems to confirm the point made by Paizis on the malleability of texts produced for mass consumption:

The problem with popular literature is that its behaviour under scrutiny is similar to that of light, it manifests the qualities that the observer expects of it [...]. Popular fiction seems uniquely able to confirm and even to amplify the presupposition with which it is approached. (1998a: 11)

The diversity of academic readings reveals numerous expectations and presuppositions about chick texts as regards their representation of women in the

public and private spheres, all of which depends on what type of poetics researchers have perceived chick texts to draw upon and how firmly they choose to locate their understanding of popular culture within a model of power and dominance.

#### **4.3.1. Femininity in the Public Sphere**

On one end of the spectrum of academic interpretations, the presence of female professional and economic power in chick texts is seen to further a romantic or consumerist agenda. Gill and Herdieckerhoff, for instance, interpret the career chick as the formulaic damsel in distress whose professional success needs to be validated by a man who saves 'the heroine from her dead-end job [by giving] her the confidence to pursue her goals [and] propel her into a "happily ever after" that in this postfeminist moment now also includes a dazzling career' (2006: 496). Despite an acknowledgement that most chick texts emphasise the heroine's professional evolution (Wells 2006: 49-50), the professional dimension is seen to function as a daily party for which heroines dress up (Kim 2001: 326) or a 'window dressing: a backdrop to the real business of finding love' (Wells 2006: 55). To Hammers, the potential progressiveness of female professionals in *AMB* is undermined by 'the ease with which the series' depictions of women are incorporated into dominant masculinist discourses' (2005: 168).

More moderate views include Philips (2000: 250), Harzweski (2006: 37) and Lotz (2006: 143) who all define chick heroines as the direct beneficiaries of Second Wave Feminism, assuming, at least in the public sphere, all the gains of the women's liberation movement. Philips further argues, however, that female characters' jobs are important 'largely because they supply the means for an urban lifestyle that is dedicated to consumption' (2000: 239). Brunnemer perceives female power in commerce, employment and decision-making in *SATC* as 'surface bravado' (2003: 14) and concludes that 'sadly [the] message seems to be that such power lies in being wealthy, white, gaunt, beautiful and chic' (Ibid.). Unlike most scholars, whose analyses remain firmly within the boundaries of the fictional text, Arthurs advances a relatively different and unique interpretation: professional women in *SATC* could be understood to realistically reflect current employment opportunities for educated urban women (2003: 85-86). This socio-cultural explanation appears to be confirmed

by studies undertaken in the late 1990s when the feminisation of traditionally masculine professions seemed to be gathering momentum (Howard and Wilkinson 1997: 18-19)(Wilkinson 1999: 41).

Leaning towards the more positive end of the spectrum, Montemurro (2004), Akass (2004) and Smith (2005, 2008) all draw attention to chick texts' ambivalence towards the patriarchal ideal of female domesticity, notably characters' negative perception of women's decision to stop working after getting married. Whelehan goes further, advancing that *BJD* 'exudes an awareness of the legacy of feminism on women's lives and Bridget's own life is testimony to that success' (2002: 44). Whelehan reads the heroines' professional and economic power as distinct from and in contradiction to the love intrigue: the power enjoyed by female characters in the public sphere contrasts with their perceived lack of control in the private sphere of intimate relationships (2002: 46). Knowles also notes this conflict and remarks that, although the high number of female property owners in chick lit may appear unrealistic,

the referential and property-focused elements of the fictions serve as anchors extending outside the romance element of the genre, balancing the otherwise unpredictable and precarious lives of these heroines with proof that they can, in spite of all the uncertainty about boyfriends, phonecalls and lipsticks, provide themselves with established trappings of security and independence. (Knowles 2004: 41)

In contradiction with Gill and Herdieckerhoff's aforementioned analysis, both Whelehan and Knowles understand the heroines' economic power to operate not only as a counterpoint to the romantic plot but also as a celebration of female self-sufficiency and agency. Chick texts' representation of issues revolving around the female body and the private sphere of intimate relationships seem to have inspired an equally wide range of academic responses.

#### **4.3.2. Femininity in the Private Sphere**

Although many have located chick texts firmly within the romantic genre, not all commentators analyse the textual presence of love and heterosexuality in the same way. Both Kiernan (2006: 208) and Gill and Herdieckerhoff (2006: 489) contend that the representation of female sexuality in chick texts reflects publishers' commercial

imperatives rather than subversive efforts. Gill and Herdieckerhoff minimise the progressive impact of sexually experienced heroines by arguing that upon meeting the hero, some heroines return to ‘an emotionally virginal state [...] which allows them to ‘admit’ their sexual timidity or inexperience after previously having boasted about their sexual expertise’ (2006: 494). Gill’s analysis of the series *SATC* follows a similar reasoning. She suggests that despite some temporary destabilising of gender and sexual identities, the series’s representation of female sexuality is highly normative, ‘heterosexual and phallic’ (Gill 2007: 244). Gill argues that *SATC* retreats into the familiar terrain of female sexual shame and thus re-establishes and reaffirms the very boundaries it appears to threaten (2007: 245-246).

Kiernan more moderately finds that the ‘inversion of gendered sexual practice’ (2006: 211) could constitute a disavowal of femininity as inherently supportive, loving, romantic, and in need of a man (2006: 210) but sees this inversion as overly simplistic, ‘reinforcing the limitations of the value system that feminism purports to reject, namely, the objectification of women’ (Ibid.). Greven (2004) also sees the reversal of gendered sexual practice as problematic but for different reasons. Like Merck (2004: 59-62), Greven finds that the reversal of the patriarchal script stems from the fact that the series *SATC* is actually about four gay men and not four heterosexual women (Greven 2004: 44-45). Although Greven acknowledges that the heroines are given control of ‘the appraising gaze [which was] customarily assumed to be the province of men’ (2004: 39), he argues that this subversive potential is undermined by the male characters’ extreme freakishness which, to him, serves to highlight the heroines’ ‘essential unmarriagability’ (2004: 47) and women’s and men’s traditional position as ‘victims and victimisers’ (2004: 46). In contrast, Nelson contends that the heroines are ‘far from presented as the pathetic, childish or whorish creatures of times past’ (2004: 94). According to Smyczynska, the representation of male freakishness in chick texts conveys both female anger and the ‘long fought-for freedom to point out male inadequacies’ (2004: 33) which, while not radically subversive, provides a certain form of power: choice (Ibid.). Viner (1999: 26), Lotz (2006: 155) and Mabry (2006: 203) take this notion of choice further and replace female inability with female unwillingness to settle down. They argue that chick characters’ dilemma is not about finding a relationship, but about finding the right

one after years of social, financial, and emotional independence. To Viner (1999: 26), a heroine's 'personal' decision to reject a man, on whatever grounds, could be construed as a political decision while Mabry explains that this dilemma speaks to 'the anxieties of many modern women' (2006: 203). Anxiety is also seen to be central to chick texts by McRobbie (2004: 12) and Whelehan (2005: 188-190).

Narrative resolutions and the figure of Mr Right are also understood in diverse and sometimes conflicting ways. Whilst both Kiernan (2006: 217) and Gill and Herdieckerhoff (2006: 496) see happy endings as neutralising the potential subversiveness of the rest of the narrative, Mabry finds them both disturbing and worrying (2006: 204-205) but still defines chick texts as 'important new visions of women's voices, communities and experiences as sexual beings' (2006: 205). Wells contends that very few novels end with the heroine's wedding and if future marriage is possible, it is not guaranteed (2006: 50). To Whelehan, the happiness of endings is not reflective of the palpable female dissatisfaction and pain in the remainder of the novels (2005: 208-211). Whelehan also comments that 'chick lit writers may be too young to be the vanguard of the Second Wave, but they are yet aware enough of feminist issues to have absorbed the cultural impact of *The Female Eunuch* and *Fear of Flying*' (2002: 67). The final line of the novel *SATC* 'Carrie and Mr Big are still together' (Bushnell 1996: 228) is interpreted in radically different ways: Kiernan reads it as 'a typical romantic closure' (2006: 217) while for Smith, it 'undermines the happily ever after ending' (2008: 88). Di Mattia's and Gill and Herdieckerhoff's view of Mr Right as the central romantic hero who saves the heroine is contradicted by both Wells (2006: 50) and Henry (2004: 73) who observe that heroines – with a few exceptions – rarely aim for marriage and appear more likely to satirise female relatives and friends for their marriage obsession. Both Arthurs (2003: 85) and Harzewski (2006: 39) find that the traditional romance narrative – whilst still embraced by a few characters – functions as a residual old-fashioned sensibility and expectation which is often presented as unpractical and/or unrealistic. To Smyczynska (2004: 31), Mabry (2006: 200-201) and Harzewski (2006: 35), Mr Right is relatively absent from the plots of chick texts where heroines' relationships with friends, family and other men are given much more narrative weight. Harzewski

also remarks that chick lit covers lack the figure of a riveting hero of phallic intensity (Ibid.).

The textual co-existence of contradictory discourses in chick texts have triggered equally contradictory reactions. Akass and McCabe see a contradiction between the 'new revelatory truths about female sex and sexuality' (2004: 194) textually offered by the *SATC* characters and the 'old-age patriarchal myths' (Akass and McCabe 2004a: 196) to which the media clings when reporting the actresses' real-life experiences of singlehood, relationships, marriage and motherhood. In her analysis of *AMB* and *BJD*, Van Slooten argues that the presence of romance in both texts should not be seen as ideologically reactionary but as a realistic reflection that romance remains a primary category of the female imagination in our residual patriarchal society (2006: 43-44). To Van Slooten, chick texts self-consciously critique the myths of romantic love and feminism in contemporary women's lives, ultimately proving that such myths need not be mutually exclusive (2006: 37). Lotz sees a similar mix in *AMB*, observing that the series is a text of great richness and depth which combines limitations and moments of conservative ideology with feminist critiques (2006: 145-152). Whelehan's analysis of chick lit echoes Van Slooten and Lotz in many ways. Beneath the romantic plots, Whelehan reads a substantial critique of contemporary women's lives and the broader social climate: a society saturated with discourse on relationships and, as previously mentioned, the uneasy reconciliation of feminism and female heterosexual desire (2005: 182-206). Whelehan also argues that chick lit is particularly coy about sex and finds such coyness 'suspicious, ultimately – are women so completely satisfied with the sex they're getting or would the depiction of troubled sex be too strident, too feminist?' (2005: 206). In this respect, Whelehan's claim that 'bad sex' is absent from chick lit appears anomalous compared to Mabry, who sees varying degrees of success and pleasure in heroines' sexual lives (2006: 200), and Smyczynska, who finds that ridiculing male impotence, immature sexual behaviour and lack of sex appeal is actually a common narrative strategy (2004: 31, 33). Both Henry (2004: 77-78) and Mabry (2006: 200-202) regard the way in which heroines' multiple sexual experiences and partners are not 'punished' as inherently progressive. In the same way as Knowles views heroines' economic power as independent of the romantic

plot, Mabry considers a heroine's autonomous heterosexuality as standing on its own rather than being part of a larger romance narrative (2006: 200). Henry sees further political implication and considers that '*SATC* participates in a redefinition of heterosexuality called for by feminist and queer theorists' (2004: 78).

Issues around the female body and female beauty have also divided opinions. Siegel contends that the *SATC* actresses' tendency to dissociate themselves from their on-screen characters reinforces the notion that the fictional women are not 'real' representations but 'images [...] for other women to consume' (2002). This view is echoed in Brunnemer (2003) who finds that despite a script which opens 'a space for the show's four protagonists to look at and talk about sex' (2003: 7), the camera tends to display the actresses' bodies, visually positioning them as passive objects to be consumed (Ibid.). Both Gill and Herdieckerhoff (2006: 497) and Umminger (2006) argue that chick lit novels do not offer an alternative to the beauty myth and instead present female thinness and beauty as 'the glass slipper of the new millennium' (Umminger 2006: 241). Moreover, Gill and Herdieckerhoff consider that chick lit's humour does not subvert the normative judgements of female attractiveness and only echoes the hollow magazine rhetoric that beauty is about pleasing oneself (2006: 497). Wells concurs to a certain extent: to her, most of chick lit vigorously upholds the beauty myths deconstructed by Second Wave Feminism but the genre differs from magazines in that heroines frankly admit to the drain of energy and resources demanded by current standards of beauty (2006: 61). Akass and McCabe note a similar contradiction in *SATC* where the protagonists demonstrate a critical distance towards glossies' narrative of female beauty regimes and 'reveal the [magazine] fantasy as construct and laugh at themselves for believing' (2004: 194). Whelehan sees the same critical distance in *Bridget Jones* who regularly acknowledges in her diary that desirable femininity is not in the least natural (2002: 48). Whelehan interprets this acknowledgement as essentially progressive: 'acting as testimony to the fact that the flawless Cosmo girl simply does not exist [...], Bridget and other chick lit heroines represent a resistance to magazine woman' (Whelehan 2005: 182). Like Whelehan, Smith argues that chick lit, far from replicating glossies' conservativeness, 'offers a serious critique of contemporary consumer culture by deconstructing the ideologies encouraged by lifestyle publications' (2008: 44).



Clearly, chick texts seem to have inspired a range of both overlapping and conflicting positions which could be said to illustrate chick texts' ideological complexity. However, one could argue that the 'people versus power bloc' debate has survived but has been displaced. As heroine-centred and women-oriented fictions now increasingly combine patriarchal values with ideological opportunities to oppose patriarchy, the debate no longer entirely revolves around whether or not one ought to defend women-oriented popular culture but whether – and which – subversive elements should be defended. To a certain extent, the way in which some studies have sought to locate chick texts firmly within the dominant discourses of patriarchy and consumerism could be said to perpetuate dualist thinking about femininity and feminism. In the next and final section, I shall clarify this study's own understanding of chick texts as generically hybrid and ideologically complex and examine the limitations of this conservative adherence to binaries of femininity and feminism.

#### **4.3.3. Binaries of Femininity and Feminism**

It could be argued that studies which have firmly situated chick texts within patriarchal ideology have perhaps been detrimental to the feminist ideology they wish to defend. As Lotz observes, continued adherence to binaries of patriarchal femininity and feminism does not address the challenges women – and by extension fictional women – face in a culture where some feminist gains have been achieved but much of patriarchy remains firmly entrenched (2006: 156). When female sexuality in chick texts is interpreted as a sign that romance readers now include young urban professionals, no explanation is given as to why this change in readership would necessitate a shift in the representation of female sexuality. Similarly, when a career change or a promotion is understood to now contribute to the 'happily ever after' resolution, the evolution itself remains unexplained. Whilst the commercial success of chick lit is regularly acknowledged, little attention is paid to the authors' agency as driven business women and the wider cultural implications of an increase in the number of female names on bestsellers' lists.

In many ways, some academics' silence around these issues is reminiscent of the conservative media's attempts to control chick texts' potential feminism. In her analysis of *AMB*, Leavy demonstrates how media attacks on the series's possible

feminism centred on the characters' private lives at the expense of their public lives (2006: 25). As she argues, critics have taken the private sphere as their point of departure when it is in the fictional public spheres that feminism can be most readily located (Ibid.). Other attempts to curtail chick characters' potential feminist voice include the media's emphasis on actresses' personal lives, beauty, thinness and rumoured anorexia (Leavy 2006: 26-27)(Whelehan 2002: 74)(Akass and McCabe 2004a: 194-198). As Van Slooten (2006: 44), Gorton (2006: 105) and Leavy (2006: 23) observe, the 'news' that the popularity of chick heroines heralded the death of feminism portrayed a generation of individualist and ungrateful young women betraying the principles of their feminist elders. What Smith calls the 'false feminist death syndrome' in the conservative media (in Tyler 2005: 26) not only oversimplified the feminist project and its supporters but also pitted reductive feminine and feminist stereotypes against each other<sup>13</sup>: feminine narcissist self-absorption against authentic feminist solidarity and collective action (Tyler 2005: 25-26). In doing so, it generated a sensational – and therefore lucrative – intergenerational disagreement also known in media parlance as a 'catfight'<sup>14</sup> (Gorton 2006: 105). Using fictional characters in order to represent the state of contemporary feminism and discredit young women has been particularly ingenious: fictional characters cannot speak back, at least not in real time (Leavy 2006: 30).

Whilst these strategies seem typical of the conservative media, some academics' continued adherence to binaries of femininity (in the form of fashion and romance) and feminism appear more disconcerting (Van Slooten 2006: 44) for it may perpetuate the very stereotypes feminist academia seeks to deconstruct. In 'Who Put the 'Me' in Feminism?', Tyler notes that feminist academics' and critics' evaluations of contemporary feminisms tend to perpetuate the patriarchal caricature of the

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<sup>13</sup> The most notable example of this is the cover of *The Time* magazine asking the potent question: Is Feminism Dead? An opposition and a historical progression are suggested by a line up of black and white portraits of Susan B. Anthony, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem and the colour picture of Calista Flockhart: a development from a suffragette and second-wave solidarity located in the past to an individualist feminism at the turn of the twenty-first century embodied by a single fictional character: Ally McBeal (Gorton 2006: 105).

<sup>14</sup> A female 'catfight' is a regular motif in the media (Douglas 1994: 221): amplified disagreements amongst feminists (Gorton 2006: 104), female competitiveness over beauty, work and family (Tanenbaum 2002) and most notably the so-called 'Mommy Wars' between working and stay-at-home mothers (Douglas and Michaels 2004).

narcissistic feminist (2005: 40). As she shows, narcissism has been consistently employed to denigrate women and feminist politics (Ibid.). In the case of chick texts, interpretations which solely concentrate on actresses' representation in the press and disregard the script could be argued to denigrate the heroines' voice and to perpetuate the very patriarchal notion – that women's appearances are central to their identity – feminists wish to denounce. The contention that male freakishness highlights heroines' position as unmarriageable victims implies that the heroines' worth and happiness can only be measured by their ability to achieve marriage and thus makes use of a patriarchal myth – unmarried women are unhappy pariahs – to dismiss the potential progressiveness of chick texts. Moreover, as Henry remarks, seeing the *SATC* characters as gay men implies

a fairly conservative and essentialist notion of identity: that there is a gay male perspective (read promiscuous) and a straight female perspective (read prudish) and there shall be no blurring between the two [...]. To dismiss, as many have done, *SATC*'s main characters as gay men in drag is to miss the larger – and potentially more threatening – point, which is the impact that gay, lesbian and queer cultures have had on heterosexuality. Such, often hostile, reactions all reveal the continuing cultural ambivalence about female sexual agency. If such agency can be written off as 'gay' – or even male – there is little need to face the larger social changes represented by women's growing sexual assertiveness. (Henry 2004: 80)

As mentioned in section 3.3., the representation of female sexual assertiveness is precisely the reason why chick texts have been both feared and celebrated. Dismissing the subversiveness of *SATC*'s representation of female sexuality because the series was originally created by two homosexual men de-legitimises the voices of three types of women: the heroines, the women who wrote and/or directed over half the episodes (Akass and McCabe 2004: 241-248)(Henry 2004: 80) and the female viewers who openly relate to the characters' sexual attitudes (Ibid.). In many ways, despite the plurality of female and feminist perspectives, studies which condemn chick texts' lack of feminist credentials suggest that the only acceptable feminist theoretical stand is that 'sexuality is primarily a site of oppression and danger for women' (Henry 2004: 75). As has been noted by others, binaries of femininity and feminism may continue to be adhered to because feminist theory has yet to develop adequate analytical tools to analyse the current sexual politics of identity practices (Tyler 2005: 40) and the complex status of fictional heroines in the twenty-first

century (Lotz 2006: 156). The absence of analytical categories could explain why some resort to frameworks positioning women as oppressed victims fundamentally lacking agency and power. Although I have concentrated here on the limitations of studies seeking to condemn chick texts' lack of feminism, it is worth noting that the absence of adequate critical tools affects more inclusive studies. When Henry, for instance, observes that the *SATC* heroines' 'sexual "selfishness", if you will, is rewarded and praised' (2006: 77-78), her use of inverted commas around the term *selfishness* shows the novelty and awkwardness of defining women as anything other than sexually selfless and passive beings.

Overall, few academics have adopted Fiske's theory of popular culture to make sense of the ideological contradictions found in chick texts but not all have chosen to interpret chick texts as conservative and their public as disempowered dupes. As will become evident throughout this thesis, notably in Chapters 4 and 5, my definition of chick texts as generically hybrid and ideologically complex is based on these more inclusive studies.

## **5. Conclusion**

Original chick texts thus present a high level of generic hybridity and ideological complexity. Influenced by the poetics of generic forms such as the romance and the women's magazine, chick texts could be located in patriarchal and capitalist discourses. However, a comprehensive analysis of all generic predecessors of chick texts reveals a more ideologically sophisticated picture, one in which chick texts seem to draw – directly or indirectly – upon the poetics of texts related to the women's movement. Even texts long associated with women's oppression such as the romance and the women's magazine appear to have contained a degree of subversiveness. This generic hybridity and ideological complexity have inspired a wide range of academic responses notably as regards the representation of femininity in the public and private spheres. Clearly, the existence of subversive elements in generic forms traditionally associated with women's social subordination has been problematic. In the light of Fiske's theory of popular culture as a site of ideological

struggle, one can see that chick texts have needed to contain elements pertaining to patriarchy as well as the means to oppose it in order to be made into popular culture. The presence of patriarchal elements, however, should not serve to negate chick texts' ideological complexity. Dismissing chick texts' potential subversiveness appears to perpetuate conservative binaries of femininity and feminism. It also overlooks how ideologically complex romances and glossies, together with sexually subversive non-fictions, CR novels, the 'superwoman' genre and heroine-centred sitcoms have created a cultural context which made the writing of chick texts possible, acceptable and even desirable. Keeping chick STs' generic hybridity and ideological complexity in mind, I shall now turn to the French cultural context, i.e. the target system into which chick texts have been introduced.

## Chapter Two

### Target System: The French Cultural Context

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter looks at the target system into which chick texts have been imported. Even-Zohar's concepts of 'system', 'centre' and 'periphery' enable me to formulate several questions whose answers will serve to map out the cultural context of France and identify the positions chick texts are most likely to occupy within it. The focus is on the characteristics of chick texts established in Chapter 1:

- commercially successful heroine-centred and women-oriented fiction;
- about one or several young, urban, professional and heterosexual women;
- often featuring one or several romantic plots or subplots;
- defined by their producers, observers and consumers as socially realistic;
- influenced by various generic predecessors from Jane Austen's novels to *Murphy Brown*;
- potentially subversive in their representation of femininity.

With these elements in mind and looking across French literature, cinema and television, I will attempt to answer the following questions: in the cultural system of France, what is the position of

- commercially successful entertainment?
- heroine-centred and women-oriented fiction?
- women's cultural production in general and potentially subversive texts in particular?
- narratives with at least one romantic plot or subplot?
- texts with professionally successful women?
- socially realistic fiction?

- chick texts' generic predecessors?

The answers to these questions are organised into two main sections corresponding to the two systems<sup>1</sup> explored: the literary and the audiovisual. In section 2, I first look at the system of French literature and its poetics in the last two centuries, concentrating on the ideological principles of universalism and elitism in relation to commercial entertainment, women writers and readers and novels featuring a romantic plot. In parallel, I examine the importation and position of chick texts' fictional and non-fictional predecessors from Austen's novels to the 'superwoman' genre. Section 3 first explores the ideological concepts of elitism and universalism in the more recent French audiovisual system. It then turns to the cultural status of televisual fiction before examining the position of subversive fictions and that of chick texts' audiovisual predecessors. Finally, three types of French audiovisual texts featuring a central female character are examined in order to determine the French audiovisual poetics of heroine-centred texts and its potential implications for chick audiovisual texts.

## **2. The French Literary System**

### **2.1. General Considerations**

#### **2.1.1. Commercial Entertainment and Elitism**

In France, much more so than in Anglo-American cultures, talent and commercial success are seen as incompatible (Dudovitz 1990: 21)(Holmes 2006: 2). Popular and 'commercial' fiction is held in disdain by the cultural establishment and critics (Dudovitz 1990: 72). A commercially successful work is not considered as an original work of creativity but as 'a product whose fabrication is controlled by the application of a few well-known formulas' (Dudovitz 1990: 55). In literature, for instance, while Anglo-American writers of entertaining bestsellers consider themselves to be in 'a real profession which requires qualities [...], talented French writers don't want to lower themselves fabricating this type of text' (Dudovitz 1990:

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<sup>1</sup> 'Contexts', 'landscapes' and 'systems' are here used interchangeably.

71). This apparent rigid distinction between high and low cultural production<sup>2</sup> in France can be explained by the elitist and institutional conception of what constitutes authentic culture. Malraux, the first Minister of Culture<sup>3</sup>, would regularly attack mass-cultural forms or the ‘dream-factories’ exploiting the ‘primitive’ pleasures that people derive from them (Looseley 1995: 36). To this ‘deluge of imbecility’, he opposed Culture in its highest and most lasting form of artistic achievement which aims to nurture man’s soul and provide him [*sic.*] with an answer on the meaning of life (Ibid.). Malraux established an institutional poetics and ideology in which the cultural became epistemologically severed from the recreational and the commercial (Looseley 1995: 37). Despised because of its easy-to-consume nature and its tendency to appeal to its consumers’ imagination, commercial fiction is particularly peripheral in the French literary system where it is considered ‘*paralittérature*’ (Durandal 2003: 5) and ‘the negative shadow against which authentic literature defines itself’ (Holmes 2006: 2). The idea itself that books are commodities seems to make the French publishing industry uneasy. Although French publishers have been increasingly adopting Anglo-American marketing and distributing strategies over the years, aggressive advertising is ambivalently seen as an attempt to lower books to the insignificant level of *petits pois* (Dudovitz 1990: 60). For fear of not being considered as ‘proper’ writers, few serious French authors write ‘novels of entertainment and dream, novels which turn towards the reader. [The French] don’t have these novels. People need to dream’ (Ibid.). Entertainment and identification, which, as demonstrated in Chapter 1, are two important elements of chick texts are thus relatively absent from the dominant centre of contemporary literature originally produced in French.

If, at first glance, this elitism does not seem particularly favourable to the importation of a best-selling genre such as chick lit, the fact that what is considered French literature seems to lack reader-oriented and entertaining novels explains why, despite being scorned, bestselling novels are regularly imported. As Dudovitz shows, French

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that this hierarchy is not static: previously popular genres, works or authors (such as Zola’s *roman-feuilletons*) have been known to enter the canon. As the intellectual Julia Kristeva’s detective novels illustrate, the rigidity of this distinction can also be contested within high cultural production itself.

<sup>3</sup> A position created to restore France’s cultural *grandeur* under de Gaulle’s recent Fifth Republic.



publishers tend to justify the presence of bestsellers in their catalogue as a necessary economic evil, which enables them to support their real cultural mission: the publication of less accessible and lucrative but more literarily worthy works (Dudovitz 1990: 56). This financial supportive role played by bestsellers shows the paradoxical position they hold within the publishing industry. As subsidisers of greater works, they are clearly subaltern and inferior within the literary system, but as publishers' principal source of revenue, they are central to the commercial system. The importation of a bestselling genre like chick lit could thus be understood in terms of three interrelated needs: French readers' *need* for reader-oriented novels *needs* to be addressed by the publishing industry which *needs* to generate revenue. Chick lit is therefore introduced into an environment which scorns and yet needs its central features. The ambivalence towards a culturally inferior yet lucrative genre such as chick lit is all the stronger when one considers that the feminine popular cultural space created by fiction such as chick texts is in contradiction with traditional Republican universalism.

### **2.1.2. Women and Universalism**

Universalism is a central concept to the dominant French republican ideology (Godin and Chafer 2004: xv-xviii)(Majumdar 2004: 16)(Hargreaves 1997: 180) according to which 'French citizens are equal, whatever their origins (social or ethnic), their age, their sexual orientation or their religion' (Rollet 2004: 175). Universalism politically expresses itself through an almost unanimous blindness or outright hostility to multiculturalism amongst politicians and intellectuals who commonly dismiss the notion as an unacceptable Anglo-American import (Hargreaves 1997: 180-182). As Rollet explains,

the significance of universalism should not be underestimated, given its influence in all areas of French society and above all in the field of culture [for] it is by virtue of this so called universalism [...] that the recognition, or even the conception, of minorities in France has proved to be extremely problematic. (2004: 175)

Even community and identity groups are reluctant to resort to identity categories for political action, preferring to claim rights as abstract and universal individuals (Harvey 1998: 310-311). The production and reception of literature is no exception

to this universalist rule. In Anglo-American cultures, the fact that literary tastes and reading habits are ‘divided almost too neatly on gender lines’ (Bloom 2002: 52) has long been recognised by publishers, writers and readers. In France, however, recognised novelists must write fiction for a sexually mixed readership and readers are allegedly weary of books written for a clearly delineated audience (Dudovitz 1990: 185). Like identity politics, ‘identity’ literature is perceived as an attempt at separatism, a challenge to the ‘universal’ nature of literature.

This scepticism is particularly apparent towards a literature by and for women. The idea of a separate women’s literature is often met by incomprehension, suspicion or antagonism amongst French publishers and editors (Hughes 1993: 263-264). With the relative exception of cinema (which will be discussed in section 3), women as a group have never occupied an important place in culture (Dudovitz 1990: 74) and have historically been invisible as cultural producers (Ripa 2002: 72). Comparing nineteenth-century French and American female writers, Dudovitz finds that the slower rate of female literacy and Catholic values retarded the development of feminine fiction in France (1990: 74). There were, however, some extremely popular and successful women writers – especially of sentimental novels – but they were, for reasons which I will soon develop, excluded from the mainstream canon. Even within the canonical centre, the rare literary female figures and their contribution often seem surrounded by ambiguity and illegitimacy: writers such as Colette or Sand were published under male pseudonyms and *La Princesse de Clèves*’s sole female authorship has been frequently called into question (Houel 1997: 14-15). As Houel observes,

tous les moyens sont bons pour exclure les femmes de la littérature officielle, autrefois comme aujourd’hui, et on trouve dans les manuels de MM. Lagarde et Michard qui initièrent à la littérature plusieurs générations d’écoliers, et d’écolières – les adultes actuelles – mille exemples des différentes façons de dévaloriser l’écriture féminine. (1997: 15)

This early and perpetuated exclusion of women from the literary canon means that, by the late 1960s, ‘in comparison with their Anglo-American sisters, the model of the writer which French women had before them was inescapably male’ (Fallaise 1993: 3). Despite the female authors who gained recognition in the 1970s, their works,

especially the *écriture féminine* genre has remained on the margins of both literary and commercial systems (Rye and Worton 2002: 7). Holmes notes, for instance, that in a 1993 review of 'French Thought' by the influential *Nouvel Observateur*, there were no women in the eighteen most important intellectual figures 'despite the international reputation of writers such as Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray or Michèle Le Doeuff' (1996: 215). The 2006 special issue of the magazine *Lire* on women and literature presents a similar case. With the exception of Julia Kristeva, the names cited by Holmes are absent, suggesting that this alternative 'feminine' literary voice does not seem to have yet reached a central position even within the peripheral system that women's literature is considered to be. The status of these writers in international academic circles does not seem to have improved their own visibility at home nor does it seem to have elevated the status of other French female writers.

A similar argument could be made about the MLF. As Fallaize observes, the women's movement appears to have made fewer gains for female writers and to have forced even sparser institutional recognition than in the Anglo-American world (1993: 21). She finds that only a quarter of novels published between August and November 1988 were written by women in France whereas 58% of British fiction published in the same year was by women (1993: 20). Although the hostility against women writers no longer openly existed, the exclusion of women from the public literary and intellectual sphere was in some ways still present in the 1980s, embodied and perpetuated by the 'arbiter of literary tastes in France' (Dudovitz 1990: 32) – the host of the influential television programme 'Apostrophes' and editor of the magazine *Lire*. As Fallaize explains:

'Apostrophes' became a national institution with the writer who succeeded in putting over an attractive screen image on Friday evening certain of seeing their sales figures rise rapidly on Saturday morning. [...] Relatively few women were ever invited onto the programme (which continued right through the 1980s) and when they did appear on it, they often proved reluctant to seize the opportunity to become media stars in the way in which some male authors did. The power which the programme's success gave its presenter, Bernard Pivot, was widely recognised [...]. A 1989 'referendum' of intellectuals (university teachers, writers, journalists, publishers, etc.) organised by a newspaper asking respondents to vote for the people in France representing intellectual power, gave Pivot top place, tying with Lévi-Strauss. There were no women in the top ten (or even twenty), contrasting sharply with the 1981 result, when both Simone de Beauvoir and Marguerite Yourcenar were included in the top ten. (1993: 24)

French intellectuals of the early 1980s – undoubtedly influenced by the recent gains of the women’s movement – had therefore begun to grant some women central positions in male-dominated systems such as literature and philosophy. However, as writing a book which would gain Pivot’s approval almost guaranteed that of the public (Dudovitz 1990: 33), ‘Apostrophes’ male-biased selection of guests and male guests’ propensity to grab the limelight seem to have re-established the philosophical and literary systems as androcentric. To an extent, ‘Apostrophes’ highlights the paradox underlying French literary universalism and elitism: commercial success is no longer incompatible with literary worth if it is enjoyed by a male author, promoted by a legitimate book programme hosted by a serious male intellectual. This paradox is particularly evident when one considers that in order to be taken seriously and therefore gain entry to the ‘universal’ canonical centre, women must – like Marguerite Yourcenar – be able to produce an ‘œuvre virile’ (Bard 2004: 244)(Houel 1997: 15-16). Ideologically subversive works, even those by the most established female writers are also most likely to be excluded from the centre. Looking at the most recognised women writers in France, Houel notes that

on ne veut retenir dans la littérature officielle que leurs œuvres les moins explosives. Ainsi connaît-on mieux les romans champêtres de George Sand que les romans plus contestataires de sa jeunesse. Ce mode de censure se retrouve pour toutes les grands écrivains qui ne doivent d’entrer en littérature qu’à condition de laisser à la porte leurs écrits subversifs: n’est cité de Simone de Beauvoir, sur les deux pauvres pages et demie que lui consacrent Lagarde et Michard, qu’un court extrait de ses *Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée*; pas une ligne du *Deuxième Sexe*. (1997: 17-18)

As Marini points out, this censorship and the way in which power relations make the acceptance of women difficult in the dominant centre of culture and literature leads one to wonder about the real nature of this dominant culture ‘frauduleusement baptisée universelle’ (1992: 140).

Writing in the early 1990s, Marini finds that if women are predominantly rejected from the literary centre, they are essential to the functioning of the system itself: the majority of students and teachers of literature are female and women are increasingly present in higher education, journalism and publishing (1992: 142). Yet by the early 1990s, the proportion of female writers remains the same as in the late 1940s: 25% (Ibid.). Marini concludes:

on voit en nous une simple force d'appoint à la culture dominante: nous sommes bienvenues comme consommatrices et servantes (courroies de transmission); supportables si nous restons dans notre ghetto; mais envahissantes quand nous occupons, quantitativement ou qualitativement, un place imprévue qui risque de changer le paysage, les règles, les modèles culturels. (1992: 142-143)

In the same way as best-selling fiction supports more prestigious literary works in the publishing industry, women also assume a supportive – and consequently subaltern – role in the French literary system either as transmitters or consumers of a literature from which they are excluded at the higher level of production and selection. The fact that there are more female than male readers in France (Fallaise 1993: 20)(Peras 2006: 28-29)(Garcia 2006a: 30) is significant when one considers the previously mentioned reluctance of the publishing industry to explicitly view books as commodities. More women than men therefore fulfil the unsavoury and yet economically necessary role of consuming literature. Garcia notes that if 'les acheteurs de livres sont des acheteuses [...] les éditeurs sont... des éditeurs. L'organigramme du Syndicat national de l'édition (SNE) tient du club de gentlemen' (2006: 30). Despite a growing number of 'directrices de collection ou d'assistantes d'édition' (Ibid.), there is a persisting absence of women at the most important and executive posts (Ibid.). Interestingly, one area of decision-making has been dominated by women: that of 'cession de droits à l'étranger' (Ibid.). Historically considered an unimportant task, it used to be delegated by the boss to his (female) secretary (Ibid.).

In the twenty-first century, female authors continue to occupy a peripheral position and women-penned books stagnate around 25% (Chandernagor in Busnel 2006: 32-34). Chandernagor explains that this is because

le milieu littéraire français est un milieu extrêmement machiste [...] la critique attaque plus facilement une femme primée qu'un homme primé, elle méprise souvent les thèmes féminins, par exemple les romans où l'on parle de grossesse, de bébés, de maternité, sous prétexte, sans doute, que ce n'est pas 'universel'. (Chandernagor in Busnel 2006: 32)

According to Chandernagor, this universalist contempt towards female writers and feminine themes is due to the fact that the literary critical apparatus is – like the publishing industry – still controlled by men, some of whom

qui n'ont jamais rendu compte d'un livre écrit par une femme. Les femmes ont des positions infiniment moins prestigieuses du point de vue littéraire. En Angleterre et aux Etats-Unis, ce n'est pas du tout le cas, notamment pour les romancières, beaucoup mieux considérées par la critique. (Chandernagor in Busnel 2006: 34)

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, chick lit is an entertaining genre exclusively written by women and mostly for women focusing on the feminine and the mundane. Its introduction in the French literary system is therefore likely to be caught between the peripheral position of entertainment in the overall cultural system, the peripheral position of a literature dealing exclusively with topics of concern to women and the peripheral position of female writers. However, the contempt towards women-oriented entertaining literature is at odds with the commercial imperatives of the publishing industry whose viability depends on female consumers of woman-penned novels featuring a romantic storyline.

## **2.2. Women's Literature and the Importation of Chick Texts' Predecessors**

### **2.2.1. The Sentimental Novel and Jane Austen**

Although entertaining fiction aimed at a specifically female readership is scorned, the enduring commercial success of *romans à l'eau de rose* shows that popular romantic fiction remains the most widely read genre in France (Holmes 2006: 116). The model and market for *romans à l'eau de rose* are not new in the French literary system. The sentimental novel primarily dealing with 'love, marriage and the education of young women' (Dudovitz 1990: 93) was already a commercially successful and increasingly feminine genre in the early nineteenth century (Bard 2004: 259)(Dudovitz 1990: 92-102). However, as Dudovitz explains, its peripheral position was due to the writers' humble and provincial origins which excluded them from literary salons and publishers in Paris and inspired Parisian scorn for the provincials (1990: 81). Culturally marginal and commercially central within the system of published literature, the paradoxically positioned nineteenth-century sentimental novel also contributed to the formation of the mainstream literary centre. Drawing on Cohen's *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (1999), Cossy shows that the aesthetics and ideology of sentimental writers are the precise elements against which Balzac, Stendhal and later Flaubert established the credibility of their

‘realist’ and ‘serious’ literature (2004: 350). Flaubert’s writing certainly reflects this dismissal of sentimentalism as filling young women’s heads with nonsensical romantic ideals (Dudovitz 1990: 103).

The peripheral position of romance in the second part of the nineteenth century intensified with the downmarket newspapers’ *feuilletons* which, unlike their prestigious counterparts, clearly catered for a female audience: the main characters were women and the principal themes were ‘love, desire, romance and marriage’ (Holmes 2006: 24). These serialised romantic novels grew popular as a result of the increasing literacy of the female population and new technologies which made printing, packaging, marketing and distributing cheaper, more accessible and attractive to readers (Holmes 2006: 23). Aimed at a mass audience with limited education, time and leisure, the narratives of *feuilletons* relied on explicit and binary characterisation: the scheming adventuress against the pure and innocent heroine, the sly villain against the strong and handsome hero (Holmes 2006: 26). Their essentially formulaic plots produced a relaxing and reassuring ease of interpretation for readers (Ibid.) but made it difficult for women writers to get published elsewhere and to be taken seriously by editors and critics (Holmes 2006: 25). The commercial success of the sentimental novel, the contemptuous attitude towards it and its impact on young females are of particular relevance when looking at the importation, adaptation and reception of Jane Austen’s novels.

Austen’s works were all available in French translation by 1824. The first and most widely read French versions of her novels were published by the ‘Bibliothèque britannique’, a publishing house whose mission was to provide readers with ‘une lecture choisie que les mères et les filles peuvent faire ensemble’ (Cossy 2006a: 174). Ensuring that proper moral values about femininity are passed on from one generation of women to the next had many textual consequences which

suggest how liberal Austen’s gender politics were. In the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, her heroine and the ‘liveliness of her mind’ needed drastic trimming to accommodate the editors’ definition of suitable reading for dutiful daughters. Their ‘Miss Eliza’ reveals by contrast the extent to which Lizzy oversteps the limits of proper womanhood through, among other things, her freedom of expression. While the text of the translation focuses exclusively on the central plot of her involvement with Darcy, her verbal exchanges with him are subjected to a process of systematic revision [...]. The equality of mind which Elizabeth

takes for granted is denied and gender distinction introduced. (Cossy and Saglia 2005: 171)

Other translations, notably by Isabelle de Montolieu, a renowned sentimental novelist, also present profound and numerous shifts affecting the plot and style of Austen's novels (Cossy and Saglia 2005: 173)(Cossy 2006: 77-292). The reason is simple: from a poetological point of view, 'Austen wrote a kind of novel that simply never existed in French' (Cossy and Saglia 2005: 174) and the sentimentalism and realism she combines belonged to distinctively different and incompatible genres. The former, as I have just explained, functioned as 'a repoussoir' (Cossy 2006a: 180) against which the latter developed. Given the dominant poetics of their time, Austen's francophone patrons were unlikely to perceive a woman-penned novel with a romantic plot as anything else but a sentimental novel. In fact, although the agenda of the 'Bibliothèque britannique's editors and that of de Montolieu might have originally been slightly different (they sought to educate young women into normative femininity whereas she sought to advance her status as a sentimental writer), the romance and marriage themes in Austen's novels were most probably the reason why they had selected her works for translation and publication in the first place. As Cossy explains, 'Austen's novels, centering on courtship and marriage, were assimilated to sentimental novels [...]. Through translation, Austen's novels were thus not only rewritten into another language but reshaped into a different genre' (2006: 122-123). Upon her entry in French literature, chick texts' most cited predecessor was thus rewritten according to the dominant poetics and ideology of the target system.

Initially disadvantaged as a woman and fully assimilated with formulaic and provincial sentimentalism through translation, Austen does not enter the French literary canon until 2000 when she is published by Gallimard under its prestigious collection 'La Pléiade'. The volume's *préface* clearly anticipates criticism (Cossy 2004: 356)(Cossy and Baglia 2005: 170), justifying this inclusion with a lengthy informative introduction to this 'auteur [*sic.*] méconnu' (in Cossy 2004: 356). La Pléiade's new translations intend to 'réparer cette injustice' (Ibid.). However, La Pléiade's mission to rehabilitate the novelist to the canonised status she deserves through new translations does not seem to have changed the French perception of



Austen in France. In its special issue on 'Les femmes et le roman' in 2006, the literary magazine *Lire* devotes a three-page dossier to 'Jane Austen, leur mère à toutes'. Despite an encouraging nod to the writer's ability to 'disséquer les grands et petits ridicules de ses contemporains' (Ballisti 2006: 42), a pink subsection on 'Le triomphe caché du roman rose' visually inscribes her in the sentimental novel tradition. Moreover, in the main article, Jane Austen is defined as the 'Barbara Cartland du XIXe' (Ballisti 2006: 44) and one reads that in her novels,

il est surtout question d'éventails brodés, d'épingles à cheveux, de commérages échangés autour d'un pique-nique et de jeunes filles rêvant de marcher jusqu'à l'autel. Noces et bals, étourdissements et chutes sans gravité composent l'essentiel du canevas austenien [...]. La campagne est verdoyante, les manières parfaites, et les fins toujours heureuses. Pas d'allusion au sexe, aucun vent de rébellion. (Ibid.)

Overlooking, as many critics do (Venuti 1997: 2), that the texts she refers to are translations which tamed Austen's most vocal heroines' relative rebelliousness, corrected their manners and emphasised their emotional and physical fragility (Cossy 2006), the *Lire* journalist reinforces Austen's position not only as an inconsequential sentimentalist writer but as the 'mother'; i.e. the model for inconsequential sentimentalism. As this thesis will demonstrate, the persisting perception of Jane Austen as a central figure in the system of sentimental literature – itself peripheral within French literature – will have important consequences for the perception and position of chick texts.

The manipulation of Jane Austen is not an isolated case. Le Brun shows that in the first French translations of *Little Women*, female characters' manners, especially those of nonconformist Joe were frequently omitted and corrected when they clashed with 'proper' feminine behaviour (2004: 51-67). One of the most lasting ideologically motivated transformations is the title, *Les quatre filles du Docteur March*, still used to this day, which suggests that the sisters' absent father is a medical doctor. His role as a chaplain in the original was deemed unacceptable in anti-clerical and Republican France of 1867 (Le Brun 2004: 50). As the next section will develop, politics, religion and ideology have a long standing tradition of involvement in young women's reading material.

### 2.2.2. Catholic Moral Romances and Interwar 'Flapper' Romances

The serialisation and feminisation of romantic literature might have led the literary establishment to dismiss the genre but the didactic potential of women's popular fiction was recognised by those in or seeking power in the second part of the nineteenth century. Holmes explains that, at the time, secular republicans and Catholic conservatives opposed each other not only over political power but also over the control of women's entertainment (2006: 30). Both sides recognised that reading – the main form of entertainment – played an important role in shaping female mentalities and, given women's social role as mothers, the next generation's mentalities (Ibid.). Conservative Catholic opinion was particularly concerned about the effect of *feuilletons* on young women's minds and thus decided to produce an alternative kind of fiction, one which would promote the values of the Church and counteract Anti-clericalism (Ibid.). To this effect, *Les veillées des chaumières* was founded in 1877 and was considerably successful (Ibid.). As in popular serials, suspense, exotic settings, ease of interpretation and romance are the central components (Ibid.). In these 'saines et intéressantes lectures', the devout Catholicism of the hero and heroine results in marriage and the creation of an equally devout family (Holmes 2006: 31). As they use the romantic genre 'pour faire passer le message social de l'Église' (Constans 1999: 207-208), Catholic romantic serials are a typical example of what Lefevere calls 'patronage' (1992: 15) in relation to ideology. In Constans's words:

à une époque où l'éducation sentimentale des jeunes filles dans les familles demeure floue ou inexistante par suite des tabous et des inhibitions qui pèsent sur le sentiment amoureux (sans même parler de la sexualité, domaine quasi-interdit), les mères et autres éducateurs délèguent leur mission au roman qui peut être mis entre les mains des jeunes filles avec l'assentiment de l'Eglise. Il est censé apporter des réponses sans danger moral aux questions que se posent les adolescentes, asseoir leur conception des rapports entre les sexes et de la relation amoureuse sur des bases 'saines', canaliser leurs rêveries et leurs espérances: un roman d'initiation. (1999: 205)

Like the aforementioned sentimental novel and the French translations of Austen in the early nineteenth century, the 'roman d'amour catholique' (Constans 1999: 207) provided young women with appropriately moral models of femininity. This ideological mission had a profound impact on the genre, integrating this educational and ideological function to the dominant poetics of romantic literature.

Delly's novels, which dominated the popular romance market in France for the first half of the twentieth century, furthered the centrality of conservative and Catholic ideologies in the poetics of romantic literature aimed at a young female readership (Holmes 2006: 49). Delly was the penname of Frédéric and Marie Petitjean de la Rosière, a brother-sister team from a Catholic, military and bourgeois family. Almost always set in provincial France, Delly's novels centre around the development and triumph of love between a man and a woman and the subsequent foundation of a devout Catholic family (Ibid.). 'La dissymétrie dans les rôles sexuels' (Constans 1999: 235) is a central feature: the heroine is young, slender, vulnerable and ignorant of sexual desire and her modesty, innocence and reserve are the essential qualities which win the strong and protective older hero's love (Holmes 2006: 52). Binary characterisation is also an important narrative device as the women who fail to observe the appropriate codes of femininity are inevitably punished in the resolution. Delly was not the only author to promote such values. Other writers such as Max du Veuzit (the penname of a woman) also contributed to the success of the moral romance, which lasted on into the 1980s (Holmes 2006: 61).

This representation of gender roles – especially the importance of women's passivity, submission and social duties – in the poetics of French romantic literature in the interwar period contrasts with the central elements of some British popular romances of the time. As explained in Chapter 1 (section 4.2.2.1.), heroines in Berta Ruck's, Ruby M. Ayres's, Netta Muskett's and Denise Robins's novels were economically independent city girls who partied, drank and smoked. This image of the post-WWI flapper was not entirely absent from French literature as the 1922 publication of Victor Margueritte's *La Garçonne* indicates. However, 'the figure of the garçonne was more mythology than fact' (Holmes 2006: 47) and the female sexual agency portrayed in Margueritte's novel triggered a general outcry in the French public opinion (Knibiehler 1996)(Houel 1997: 60). Moreover, romances which presented and glamorised social and financial autonomy as an alternative to the traditional female life trajectory were relatively absent from French romantic fiction and few 'flapper' romantic novels were translated into French. Indeed, while Berta Ruck, Ruby M. Ayres, Netta Muskett and Denise Robins had published a total of hundred and thirty titles by 1940, only eight of those appeared in French.

Although often incomplete<sup>4</sup>, bibliographical records give an idea of the peripheral entry of British ‘flapper’ romances in the French system of romantic literature. While it is impossible to measure the success of the eight translations which did appear<sup>5</sup> (the lack of re-editions and reprints could be as much due to their unpopularity as the later repression under Vichy), certain aspects of their importation into the French literary system appear similar to Jane Austen’s importation. Two novels, for instance, were published under *Le Petit Echo de la Mode*’s ‘Collection Stella’ which claimed to be the ‘collection idéale des romans pour la famille et la jeune fille par sa qualité morale et sa qualité littéraire’ (Holmes 2006: 60). As Constans explains,

la majorité des volumes Stella [...] se placent dans une perspective éducative et moralisatrice d’inspiration catholique et bourgeoise. Le bonheur dans le mariage chrétien, ‘l’amour permis’, le maintien des valeurs familiales et traditionnelles, l’obéissance et la soumission de la femme à son mari, la fidélité, l’affirmation de l’indissolubilité du mariage. (1999: 221)

The novels published under this series therefore perfectly perpetuated the mission of moral romances: ‘to discourage transgression by glamorising the restricted destiny allotted to women’ (Holmes 2006: 61). Another novel was published by Tallandier, a publishing house which, at the time, mainly published romance writers, amongst whom Delly and du Veuzit (Holmes 2006: 61). Out of the five records which acknowledge that the texts are not originals, three are actually defined as adaptations. Given the publishers’ literary and moral mission, one can only speculate about the extent to which British ‘flapper’ romances needed to be adapted in order to conform to the dominant poetics and ideology of romantic literature in the interwar period. Indeed, in Britain, these novels reflected women’s changing socio-cultural expectations and opportunities both in the public and private spheres (Bingham 2004). The figure of the flapper contributed to the ‘disappearance of the ‘home’ as the locus of the female’s interests and the feminine experience of reality [and] the redefinition and remodelling of the woman’s place’ (Melman 1988: 150). In contrast, there seems to have been little redefinition or remodelling of the woman’s place in 1930s France where women’s lives changed comparatively little in terms of rights and permissible ways of living (Holmes 2006: 47). Such a socio-cultural context was

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<sup>4</sup> None of the records list the source text’s title, making it impossible to know which novels were the originals for the French editions.

<sup>5</sup> Muskett’s and Robins’s novels do not seem to have been published in French in the interwar period.

therefore not favourable to a type of novels which valorised female financial and social independence and challenged the poetics of fixed gender identity central to the romantic genre. While the minor and marginal penetration of 'flapper' romances into the French system of romantic literature may have indicated that renewal was on its way and that a new primary centre of romantic fiction might emerge, WWII and the Occupation soon put an end to this new development and the primacy of moral romances glorifying the dominant androcentric ideology strengthened under the Vichy government. As I will show in the following section, the end of WWII did not lead to the demise of patriarchal discourses and two opposite literary trends seem to have developed at this time of renewed conservatism: the rebellious anti-romance and imported Anglo-American fiction.

### **2.2.3. Post-WWII Anti-Romances and the Rise of Barbara Cartland**

The conservatism of the 1950s and 1960s is reflected in the enduring popularity of moral romances during this period as well as the creation of conservative romance magazines such as *Confidences* and *Nous Deux* (Holmes 2006: 74)(Constans 1999: 248). Against this backdrop of media and governmental conservative discourses on maternity and matrimony (Duchen 1994: 96-127), Sagan published her first controversial best-selling anti-romance *Bonjour Tristesse* (1954). Sagan's female characters depart from conventional romantic heroines in many ways: they are neither sexually pure nor naïve, they lack modesty, innocence and reserve and reject normative models of female fulfilment (Holmes 2006: 87). Despite Sagan's anti-sentimentalism, the social and sexual freedom of her heroines and her critique of her social circle's shallowness, Holmes contends that the novelist works within the territory of romance (2006: 91). Yet, a number of elements suggest that she was not considered a writer of *romans à l'eau de rose* by her peers. She was a public figure, close to those in power, and a regular guest on 'Apostrophes' (Fallaise 1993: 29). Moreover, although the heroines populating her first novels clearly transgress 1950s social and sexual mores, this transgression is somewhat limited in that none of them seek financial independence (Holmes 2006: 87).

The absence of financially autonomous heroines, even in the most subversive woman-authored novels contrasts with the situation in Britain where, as discussed in

Chapter 1 (section 4.2.2.1.), mass-market romantic novels by Jane Arbor, Barbara Stanton and Eleanor Farnes promoted women's equal rights to employment and independence. Appendix 9 shows the limited extent to which these writers' novels were published in France compared to Barbara Cartland whose romances were mainly published by Tallandier. While less than an eighth of Arbor's, Stanton's and Farnes's novels appeared in France over the two decades following WWII, more than a third of Cartland's did. This selectivity could be explained by the way in which Cartland's conservatism suited Tallandier's conservative educative agenda in the 1950s and 1960s: feminine modesty and chastity are the ideological norms in Cartland's novels (Makinen 2001: 28)(Houel 1997: 71). As I will demonstrate, Cartland represented a perfect continuity of the cheap moral romance whose lasting success – despite constant reprints and re-editions – would eventually be compromised by the deaths of Marie and Frédéric Petitjean de la Rosière in the late 1940s. Of course, Cartland's popularity was also growing in the English-speaking world but her representation of the romantic heroine as chaste and modest was only one amongst many. As Chapter 1 (section 4.2.2.1.) showed, by the 1960s, a single woman was expected to work and such an expectation was reflected and reinforced by the image of autonomous womanhood which Helen Gurley Brown successfully captured in her best-selling manual *Sex and the Single Girl* in 1962. It is to the position of the French translation of this best-seller as well as the new format of the magazine *Cosmopolitan* inspired by it that I shall turn now.

#### **2.2.4. Sexually Subversive Non-Fiction**

As mentioned in Chapter 1 (section 4.2.2.2.), *Sex and the Single Girl* has been doubly credited for its foregrounding admission that women were sexual beings (Groneman 2001: 159) and the way in which it 'explode[d] the myth of natural, effortless sex appeal' (Whelehan 2005: 27). Moreover, its author, Helen Gurley Brown, who became *Cosmopolitan*'s editor in 1965, has been repeatedly defined as the cultural ancestor of heroines populating chick texts (Whelehan 2002: 28)(Siegel 2002: 7)(Arthurs 2003: 87). *Sex and the Single Girl* was published in France in 1963 under the bizarre title *Quitte ou double* and was 'traduit de l'américain par Jeannie Chauveau et Huguette Couppié' (CCFR). Despite this translation, the lack of reprints or re-editions suggests that the book did not enjoy the best-selling status it did in its

original culture. In fact, the French bibliographical record of the 1964 movie *Sex and the Single Girl* shows how obscure the book *Sex and the Single Girl* and its French translation have become. The film *Sex and the Single Girl* is based on the concept of a central heroine – Helen Gurley Brown – becoming famous overnight for having written a best-selling manual on sexuality and single women. As the script was partially written by Brown herself, the appeal of this comedy lies in its playful intertextuality between fact and cinematic fiction. The record of *Une vierge sur canapé* – the more explicitly titled French version – seems to indicate otherwise. Firstly, the change of title from the translated manual suggests that French distributors were either unaware of this publication or that it was not deemed relevant or popular enough to appeal to a potential audience. Secondly, despite the fact that the book *Sex and the Single Girl* is a non-fiction, this film is, according to the CCFR record, ‘tiré d’un roman de Helen Gurley Brown’. Furthermore, despite the regular re-edition of her work in the English-speaking world, only one of Brown’s six subsequent best-sellers (*Sex and the Office*) seems to have been published in French under the title *Éros au bureau*. This book does not seem have been reprinted or reedited. All this seems to indicate the relative absence of Helen Gurley Brown and the sexually and financially independent Cosmo Girl she created in her image from the French cultural system.

The absence of the Cosmo Girl image in 1960s France was rectified in 1973, when the magazine *Cosmopolitan* in Brown’s formula appeared for the first time. Interestingly, *Cosmopolitan*’s very first French issues were translations of American original editions (Bonvoisin and Maignien 1986: 38) before the editorial content became independent (Ibid.). The importation of *Cosmopolitan* seems to be an attempt on the magazine publishing industry’s part to ‘capitalize on feminism’ (Allison 2000: 72) at a time when the women’s movement had significantly compromised their sales. Indeed, in order to recover their readership in the 1970s and early 1980s, publishers launched new titles with a strong American connection such as *Vital* with its emphasis on American fitness activities (Bonvoisin and Maignien 1986: 39) and *Biba* ‘inspiré d’une formule américaine, a working woman magazine’ (Bonvoisin and Maignien 1986: 40). Meanwhile, existing French titles such as *ELLE* ‘gradually shifted [their] emphasis to compete with more general ‘lifestyle’ publications such as

*Cosmopolitan*' (Allison 2004: 237). As Bonvoisin and Maignien conclude, the new model of women's magazines in the 1970s and 1980s was primarily American (1986: 41). In the light of these new magazines' high circulation and sales figures (Nicolas 1989: 77)(Bard 2004: 258), one could argue that the American-inspired women's magazine enabled the system of French glossies to subsist by providing it with a new model.

Interestingly, although they are derived from an American format, Nicolas stresses that these publications cannot be considered American *per se*:

*Cosmopolitan, Glamour* sont des reprises de titres américains existants mais ils ne sont pas les reproductions de leurs homonymes (sauf *Cosmopolitan* à ses débuts en 1973). Ces publications ont des rédactions indépendantes, un contenu différent et sont considérées hors de France comme étant typiquement françaises. (1989: 76)

Moreover, if *la presse féminine* publishes American articles, 'elle ne se contente pas de traduire: elle les adapte aux goûts du lectorat français' (Nicolas 1989: 75). This process of selection and adaptation according to the perceived tastes of female readers echoes the way in which romantic novels have been selected and adapted to suit a certain poetics and ideology. As section 2.2.6. will show, this tendency to select and adapt according to women's tastes has been amplified with the arrival of Harlequin France and other publishers of romances on the French market. Although Anglo-American glossies and French glossies seem similar in their appearance, the difference in content (to accommodate French readers' tastes) and the eight-year delay between Brown's first editorship of *Cosmopolitan* and the 1973 French launch of the magazine could point to a slight poetological difference between them. I would like to suggest that this difference may lie in the publications' modes of address. Indeed, from its beginnings, the mode of address chosen by Brown's *Cosmopolitan* is one which appears to believe – rightly or wrongly – that their readers are *already* sexually, economically and professionally emancipated (Ouellette 1999: 379). In contrast, equivalent women's magazines in France tend to address their readers as though they still needed to be fully liberated (Allison 2004: 252). This difference in modes of address explains some other differences, notably in the representation of female professional success. As Dudovitz notes in the late



1980s, if French women's magazines ran features on high-achieving women, such women were defined as having done something unusual rather than normal (1990: 186).

Like the translation of Brown's *Sex and the Single Girl*, the French translation of sexually subversive non-fictional texts by, for and about women such as *Our Bodies, Ourselves* have appeared in translation at the periphery of the French system before disappearing from it entirely. The importation of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* also presents two interrelated similarities with that of *Cosmopolitan*. First, it was not instant. Second, when the importation did occur, it seems to have been motivated by its topical content, which, until then, does not appear to have been deemed relevant and/or appealing by French publishers. Initially published in America in 1971 when the women's movement was in full force, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* appeared six years later in France under the impetus of a French feminist group who discovered the original on a trip to the US (Bizos-Cormier et al. 1977: 10). In the foreword, this group (who also produced the French version) describes the difficulties they encountered to obtain a publishing contract: many publishers, including women-oriented or female ones, turned them down on the grounds that the book's extreme Americanness and its depiction of the female body compromised the book's selling potential (Bizos-Cormier et al. 1977: 11). Others suggested that the book be completely rewritten and adapted, an idea which seemed unthinkable by the feminist group at the time (Ibid.). Ironically, the French publishers' reservations as regards the book's selling potential and the need to adapt it transpired to be founded. After initially limiting themselves to a 'simple' process of translation, the group eventually recognised that their texts were illegible and that they needed to approach their source text more critically and adapt 'entièrement et partiellement certains chapitres en raison des différences entre la France et les Etats-Unis' (Ibid.). Although a comparative analysis of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* and its French adaptation is not within the scope of this research, a cursory look at the two books reveals modifications regarding women's sense of togetherness and need to unite as well as female bodies' capabilities and need to engage in sports. Nutrition is also given a more predominant place in *Notre corps, nous mêmes*. Comparatively, the French version sold less copies than in the US (Zancarini-Fournel 2004: 209) and its limited

and ephemeral<sup>6</sup> success seems to have been aided by the topicality of women's contraceptive and abortion rights at the time (Zancarini-Fournel 2004: 210). Unlike the original, the French adaptation was not re-edited or reprinted and it did not inspire a widespread women's health movement.

The French translation of Nancy Friday's *My Secret Garden* published three years after its original publication seems to have sunk into a similar oblivion. *Mon jardin secret* does not seem to have ever been re-edited or reprinted in France and its absence from the Amazon.fr catalogue indicates how unnoticed this anthology of female fantasies was upon publication and how inaccessible it has become. The publication of the *Hite Report* in 1977 attracted much more attention but for reasons beyond the text itself. Unlike the serious and neutral cover of the original, the French publisher chose to package 'la traduction française avec une femme nue sur la couverture et des sous-titres accrocheurs sur "l'enquête la plus intime", livrant les "secrets de la vie sexuelle de trois mille femmes"' (Montreynaud 1992: 609). The failure of *Sex and the Single Girl*, *Our Bodies Ourselves*, *My Secret Garden* and the *Hite Report* to be durably noticed or taken seriously upon their publications means that, unlike Britain and America, a legitimate and autonomous feminine cultural space exclusively dealing with women's sexuality from a female point of view was not created. I shall now look at what could be considered the fictional equivalents of these texts: Anglo-American Consciousness-Raising (CR) novels and their importation and position in the French literary system.

### 2.2.5. Consciousness-Raising Novels

The history of the importation of CR novels in France is characterised by gaps and delays. The CR novelist Dorothy Ballantyne and notably her 1975 best-selling *Norma Jean the Termite Queen* does not seem to have ever been published in France. Mae Rita Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle*, originally published in 1973 appears in French in 1978. The French translation, titled *Molly-Mélo*, does not seem to have been reprinted or re-edited. While seven of Brown's mystery fictions appeared in French between 1994 and 2003, her nine novels in the same vein as *Rubyfruit Jungle* do not

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<sup>6</sup> Zancarini-Fournel ambiguously talks of 'dizaines de milliers d'exemplaires' (2004: 207) which even in its most optimistic sense would not define the book as a bestseller.

seem to have ever been published in France. Lisa Alther seems to have fared slightly better. *Ginny*, the French translation of *Kinflicks*, was published in 1977 by Gallimard, a year after its original publication and seems to have been reprinted the next year. This reprint, however, did not lead to a *poche* format, which considerably reduces the potential impact of this relatively successful translation. To a certain extent, the relative failure of these CR novelists to be durably published or noticed echoes that of the aforementioned sexually subversive non-fictional texts. However, the success and fame of two American CR novelists – Erica Jong and Marilyn French – show that not all CR works were excluded from the centre of the French literary system.

Erica Jong and Marilyn French seem to have been very successful in France in the 1970s and 1980s. Originally published in 1977, Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* was published by Robert Laffont a year later under the title *Toilettes de femmes*. *Toilettes de femmes* appears to have been regularly re-printed and re-edited until 1992 in Laffont's 'Littérature étrangère' category and by the *réédition* publisher Le Livre de Poche. *Le Complexe d'Icare*, the French translation of Jong's *Fear of Flying* seems to have enjoyed a similar success. From its first publication in 1973 by Laffont, *Le Complexe d'Icare* was reprinted and re-edited at least nine times, five of which by a leading *poche* publisher, J'ai lu. By 1984, it had sold 500,000 copies and Jong was invited onto the previously mentioned programme 'Apostrophes'.

Four interrelated factors could be said to have influenced the popularity of these novels. Firstly, the authors' international success was widely publicised (Fallaise 1993: 14) and Jong's and French's focus on the social and political aspects of women's lives was very topical at the time. As Fallaise notes, 'in the 1970s the interest in women created by the women's movement opened many publishers' doors' (1993: 16). Secondly, the female realist confessional genre to which Jong and French belonged had also emerged within the system of mainstream French women's literature, notably with the works of Annie Ernaux and Claire Etcherelli (Ibid.). Thirdly, despite the clear link between the women's movement and the novels of some female authors, both *Fear of Flying* and *The Women's Room* were translated by male translators: Georges Belmont and Philippe Guilhaon. As the next section will

show, the majority of Anglo-American women writers – especially of popular literature for and about women – traditionally tend to be translated by women, thus contributing to an almost entirely female circuit of communication (Holmes 2006: 20). In the case of Jong and French, this female circuit appears to have been broken. Fourthly, despite the gender of *Le Complexe d'Icare*'s original author, the French translation was marketed as ambiguously masculine and as reading material suitable for and appealing to men. Indeed, both the Laffont and J'ai lu editions feature a preface and a quote by Henry Miller praising Jong for writing like a man and for being 'plus directe, plus franche que bien des auteurs masculins'. Jong has thus been placed in the male centre of the system of translated literature in France. The 'masculinisation' of Jong's work appears to have concealed the original intended audience of her novel: women. Indeed, French editors and publishers had initially been ambivalent about *Fear of Flying*'s target female readership to the point of refusing to publish the novel because 'les éditeurs, des hommes majoritairement, arguaient que les femmes françaises n'avaient "pas besoin de ce livre", au prétexte qu'elles n'ignoraient rien de la sexualité' (Jong in Widemann 1998). In this light, the literary masculinisation of *Le Complexe d'Icare* constitutes an interesting marketing twist and one which, in some ways, echoes that of the previously mentioned *Hite Report*. Indeed, J'ai lu included the novel in its 'Romans érotiques' catalogue, redefining the sexual content of Jong's novel in male terms<sup>7</sup>. The decision to position Jong's work as both masculine and erotic as opposed to feminine and provocative is revealing of the paradoxical limits of the notion of a genderless universal reading public. As a publishing house specialised in *réédition*, J'ai lu is more concerned with commercial profits than literary worth and its decision to include Jong in erotica also shows that, in practice, reading publics are specifically delineated and targeted. The inclusion of Jong in erotica implicitly excludes a female reading public on two levels. Firstly, as the following section will explain, French women readers are believed to dislike sexual explicitness. Secondly, by the time of its publication of *Le Complexe d'Icare* in 1978, the publishing house had created a new series catering for

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<sup>7</sup> The redefinition of *Fear of Flying*'s sexual content and the subsequent success of Jong as a masculinised author could here be compared to the marginalisation of the previously mentioned *Rubyfruit Jungle* whose female homosexual content may have made it more difficult to repackage the novel in male and heterosexual terms.

women readers: *J'ai lu pour elle*. Significantly, Jong's novels never appeared under this explicitly feminine category of novels. In fact, the first author to be published under this new 'collection' in 1977 was Barbara Cartland, the highly prolific British writer of romances. Her introduction into the *J'ai lu* catalogue and the subsequent mass publication of most of her titles coincided with the launch of Harlequin France. The next section will deal with the position of both Cartland and Harlequin novels in the French cultural and literary systems.

#### **2.2.6. Mass-Market Romances in the 1980s**

By 1977, thirty of Barbara Cartland's romances had already appeared in French translation, mostly published by Tallandier, which specialised in cheap paperback moral romances aimed at young women. Having replaced Delly and other moral romance writers as the model for moral romances<sup>8</sup>, Cartland therefore already assumed a commendable position in the system of commercial and romantic literature. The fact that the renewal of romantic literature has depended on an Anglo-American model in the 1960s is significant and seems to have marked a turning point in the publishing of romantic literature in French. The inclusion of Cartland in the '*J'ai lu pour elle*' catalogue and the subsequent publication of over five hundred titles strengthen her central position in the system of romantic literature as well as the commercial system. Indeed, within a decade, Cartland had sold over twenty-five million copies of her novels and the revenue and employment generated were such that in 1988, she was awarded the 'médaille d'or de la ville de Paris' (Grisolia 2001). Unsurprisingly, Cartland's commercial success has earned her the scorn of many a French literary critic. In *L'Express Livres*, for instance, she is described as 'la panthère rose du roman de gare [qui] vend du rêve selon une formule parfaitement au point' (Grisolia 2001). Like nineteenth-century sentimental novels and cheap *feuilletons*, Cartland displays all the qualities against which French literature defines itself: formula, commerciality and femininity. Cartland became not only the new

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<sup>8</sup> A history of Tallandier on the publisher's website reads: 'De petits livres très courts, qui vont imposer ce genre qu'on appellera beaucoup plus tard 'roman sentimental': Delly, Max du Veuzit, Magali, Claude Jaunière, Claude Virmonne, Léo Dartey, Concordia Merrel ou Line Droze relayés dans les années soixante, toujours chez Tallandier, par Barbara Cartland' (<http://www.tallandier.com/edition.php>).

centre of moral romances but also the new centre of imported Anglo-American romantic literature. As mentioned in section 2.2.1., literary journalists in 2006 define Austen as the ‘Barbara Cartland du XIXe’ (Ballisti 2006: 44), creating the illusion that Cartland is Austen’s direct successor. The dominance of the Anglo-American model in the system of romantic literature was also greatly reinforced by the creation of a French subsidiary of Harlequin, the international publisher of mass-market romantic fiction (Paizis 2002: 474).

As Paizis notes, Harlequin France’s ‘translations of English-language contemporary romances were so successful that in six years, it had reached a sales peak of twenty million books and a readership of six million’ (2002: 474). It currently releases forty-seven new titles a month and estimates its sales at over fifteen million novels a year (Bard 2004: 259). Despite many bookshops’ refusal to sell Harlequin novels (Garcia 2006b: 42), Harlequin not only leads the romance market but is now the second biggest publisher of *poche* format books in France (Durandal 2003: 14). Two main factors could be said to have facilitated Harlequin’s successful implantation in France. Firstly, the formula of the frail young girl whose social identity and duties are validated through marriage had been, as previously seen, an important poetological element in the French romantic genre (Dudovitz 1990: 99)(Holmes 2006: 54). Secondly, Harlequin delegates and decentralises executive decisions to its local subsidiaries. Although its novels are all written by Anglo-American authors and set in either North America or the UK, the task of national branches is to research the local market, select novels, employ and supervise translators, and deploy a sales strategy accordingly (Holmes 2006: 119). As Holmes explains, this is achieved through ‘an almost entirely female circuit of communication’ (2006: 120) from the female team of marketers and translators at Harlequin France to the women who buy, read and give feedback which is in turn incorporated in the female team’s market research. In this circular relationship between producers and consumers, unpublished novels are also tested on a representative ‘panel de consommatrices’ (Durandal 2003: 6). In order to achieve Harlequin’s global aim – to sell more novels at the cheapest cost possible – decisions are taken to reflect readers’ tastes and expectations at each stage of the process. I shall now explore four aspects of the novels published by Harlequin France, whose selection, adaptation and circulation would have a profound

impact on the importation of later texts, such as chick texts, which, from an editorial and marketing point of view, clearly present three similar narrative elements: an Anglophone background, a romantic plot and, as I will elaborate below, a heroine whom readers might not only identify with but also learn from.

The first, most significant, aspect is the continuing perception of romances as potentially educational reading for female teenagers. Although Harlequin and similar publishing houses ‘ne prétendent nullement avoir une fonction éducatrice’ (Péquignot 1991: 15-16), the ‘rôle d’initiation à la féminité’ (Durandal 2003: 6) still seems to be embedded in the poetics of the genre. In Constans’s words:

le pourcentage d’adolescentes est très fort parmi les lectrices du genre; pour cette catégorie d’âge le roman d’amour joue le rôle d’un médiateur dans l’initiation au rituel amoureux. [...] L’éducation sexuelle est inscrite dans les programmes scolaires, les magazines pour jeunes parlent librement de la sexualité et des questions de la vie sentimentale. Le roman d’amour prolonge cet apprentissage par la relation d’expériences imaginaires. (1999: 272)

Although Harlequin and other publishing houses might not explicitly market themselves as intending to morally educate young women, one could advance the hypothesis that the imaginary experiences narrated in romances would tend to reflect and reinforce the normative values about femininity and heterosexuality which are dominant in young readers’ socio-cultural environment.

This hypothesis would seem to be confirmed by the second aspect: a marked sexual conservatism in the translations and adaptations of Anglo-American novels into French. Indeed, in Harlequin France novels, sexual scenes are frequently modified where the original descriptions are perceived as ‘brutales [...], clinique[s] et gynécologique[s], ce qui n’est pas du tout du goût des lectrices françaises’ (Constans 1999: 252). As Houel explains,

des images empreintes de délicatesse, de sensualité permettent de faire l’impasse sur la crudité de la sexualité, telle qu’on la trouve dans les éditions originales: ‘En anglais, c’est trop détaillé, c’est l’horreur’, s’offusque une lectrice française. En France, on censure ces passages, la maison Harlequin suivant au plus près l’évolution de sa clientèle effectuant des sondages tous les trois mois. Les clientes interrogées peuvent alors se permettre d’évoquer ‘quelque chose de beau, quelque chose de naturel’. (1997: 106)

Interestingly, although these novels serve to complement sexual education, detailed sexual references are seen as repulsive and contrary to the representation of sexuality expected by Harlequin France's readership: a naturally beautiful 'thing'. 'Couper, édulcorer, ajouter un peu plus de sentiment et de tendresse' (Constans 1999: 252) avoid indignant responses from readers as regards the heroine's 'vulgarité' (Houel 1997: 107). A specific value concerning female sexual modesty seems to be held: 'le désir féminin n'est autorisé qu'à condition d'être né du désir masculin et d'y rester soumis' (Ibid.). Equality of sexual desire is thus replaced by a poetological element which can be traced back to the sixteenth century: 'la convention veut que l'amour, immédiat et fatal chez son partenaire, naisse lentement chez elle au prix d'une difficile conquête qui triomphe de sa pudeur' (Lazard in Houel 1997: 107). In catering for its readers' tastes and expectations, Harlequin France effectively rewrites romances according to the continuing poetics of romantic literature and the dominant ideology of femininity and heterosexuality.

The third aspect of Harlequin France novels appears to originate from the previously mentioned incompatibility of social realism and sentimentalism. As early as the 1980s, Anglo-American writers started to experiment outside of the white, heterosexual and middle-class setting by addressing and representing social issues and minorities (Dudovitz 1990: 108). In their selection of novels marketable to the French public, Harlequin France and other similar publishing houses such as Duo (subsequently bought by Harlequin) do not seem to have followed suit, remaining faithful to the white middle-class love plot and avoiding contemporary social issues (Dudovitz 1990: 109): 'external problems [...] do not – and according to the fictional conventions cannot – enter the romantic fictional world. Anything approaching the real day-to-day problems women encounter, apart from their relationships with men, remains off limits' (1990: 110). This exclusion of multicultural and socially relevant romances shows that despite the culturally peripheral status of novels for, about and by a subordinate group such as women, female readers' tastes and expectations are still informed by the dominant poetics and ideology which require not only romantic characters of a certain ethnic and social class but also plots devoid of certain socio-culturally relevant elements. However, as I will show below, one new socio-



culturally realistic element seems to have entered the romantic fictional world in France via Harlequin translated novels: the contemporary workplace.

The fourth and final aspect concerns the contemporary workplace where the plot of many translated romances appears to be set. The source texts for these French translations seem to be the career romances which, as shown in Chapter 1 (section 4.2.2.1.), have been perceived as one of the predecessors of chick texts. Three analyses can be advanced regarding the function of this relatively new development in romantic fiction in French. Firstly, the popularity of these novels could be said to reflect French women's changing expectations and aspirations (Paizis 2002: 474). If identification with the main character is an important characteristic of consumers' reading experience, the selection and translation of career romances seems indeed strongly related to French women's growing entry into paid employment. Secondly, the publication of these novels under the name 'série américaine' by Harlequin France (Paizis 1998a: 20) could also suggest that the professional background functions as part of the

simplified world far removed from that of most readers [which creates] a 'dépaysement' (sense of pleasurable unfamiliarity) that is heightened for French readers by the characters' English names and the North American or occasionally English setting. (Holmes 2006: 123)

As shown in section 2.2.1., an exotic backdrop was already an important poetological element in women-oriented serialised *feuilleton*. Thirdly, in her analysis of romantic literature in France, Holmes finds that in these particular novels, a heroine's work is an obstacle which, in order to win her love, the hero must overcome by accepting and respecting it (2006: 121). Holmes does not touch upon the nature of a heroine's profession or indeed her professional worth and refers to a general 'right to a degree of independence' (Ibid.) to be validated by the hero. This working woman whose independence is now central to the romantic plot is also echoed in Durandal who notes the emergence of a new heroine 'bien insérée dans le monde du travail: indépendante' (2003: 11). This notion of financial 'independence' rather than full professional success and power also seems to permeate romance publishers and editors' understanding of romantic heroines. One of Duo's editorial briefs, for instance, specifies that the heroine should be a 'jeune fille moderne, **indépendante**

qui travaille (secrétaire, comptable, journaliste ou artiste, mais avec un tout petit talent)’ (Paizis 1998a: 36 my emphasis). As Chapter 4 will demonstrate, this editorial emphasis on romantic heroines’ independence on the one hand and their limited professional abilities on the other seems to have influenced the reception, interpretation and representation of chick female characters’ potential or real professional power and success.

Although the majority of romantic novels published in France by Harlequin and ‘J’ai lu pour elle’ are originally written by Anglophone writers, their selection and adaptation are shaped by the dominant poetics and ideology of France. As the next chapter will show, the way in which these Anglo-American romantic texts circulated almost exclusively within a feminine network in the two decades preceding the introduction of chick texts in France has had a considerable impact on the way chick lit was initially perceived, translated, edited and marketed. I will now examine the ‘superwoman’ genre in France to determine the extent to which its importation and position in the French literary system may have affected chick lit upon its introduction into France.

#### **2.2.7. The ‘Superwoman’ Genre**

Although ‘superwoman’ novelists were not introduced in a diametrically opposite position to Harlequin, French patrons of translated ‘superwoman’ novels do not seem to have likened the genre to the pre-existing *romans roses*. There are two interrelated reasons for this. Firstly, the imagined target readers of ‘superwomen’ novels are not female adolescents for whom a specific educative mission must be fulfilled but more mature women aged ‘between fifty and sixty years old’ (Dudovitz 1990: 71). Secondly, the delineation of this readership is itself motivated by the genre’s appeal to the French book market: its family saga quality (Dudovitz 1990: 71-72).

The case of British Barbara Taylor Bradford – one of the most successful ‘superwoman’ novelists – is, in fact, partially reminiscent of Jong’s introduction into the French literary system. Most of Bradford’s novels appear to have been translated and published in French within one or two years of their original publications and French editions are regularly reprinted. A cursory look at French reviews and blurbs suggests that ‘saga’, ‘dynastie’ and ‘familiale’ are the most frequent terms describing

her books. Tellingly, none of her translated novels appear under an explicitly 'sentimental' or women-oriented series. Instead, they are published under generic series such as 'romans contemporains' or foreign literature sub-series such as Belfond Étranger's 'grands romans' or 'grand livre du mois' or les Presses de la Cité Étranger's 'romans'. Les Presses de la Cité Étranger's mission and classification of its published translations are particularly revealing of Bradford's position in the system of translated literature in France. Les Presses de la Cité Étranger covers 'tout le spectre de la littérature populaire de qualité' (Bombard 2007) and aims to 'fai[re] découvrir au grand public des auteurs à la renommée internationale' (Ibid.). Four elements appear to differentiate Bradford's work from other translated women-oriented novels published by Harlequin France and 'J'ai lu pour elle'. Firstly, being published by les Presses de la Cité Étranger defines Bradford as a popular author 'de qualité', thus elevating and distinguishing her fiction from another – inferior – type of popular literature. Secondly, although, in practice, the readers of her French translations are mainly female, les Presses de la Cité Étranger's definition of its imagined target readership is suitably mainstream and gender-free. Thirdly, unlike the promotion and distribution of mass-market romantic fiction where the concept of category and series plays a much more important role than that of authorship (Houel 1997: 13)(Péquignot 1991: 36), les Presses de la Cité Étranger highlights that it publishes *auteurs* of international fame. This echoes the way in which Jong's international celebrity motivated the publication of her works in France. Last but perhaps not least, over half of Bradford's novels are translated by male translators (the majority of which by Michel Ganstel), thus breaking the aforementioned female circuit of communication conventionally associated with the importation of Anglo-American popular literature for and about women. Despite evident similarities between imported 'superwomen' novels and other imported Anglo-American popular fiction aimed at women, 'superwoman' novelists such as Bradford seemed to have been positioned in a more central, universal and mainstream position within the system of translated popular literature in France and as such, the introduction and place of these predecessors of chick lit writers seem to have had a limited impact on the introduction and place of chick texts themselves.

An overview of the system of French literature prior to or at the time of the importation of chick texts reveals a complex picture. The notions of elitism and universalism both appear to be at work in the hierarchy of French literature: female authors seem to be excluded from the canonical centre while women's popular literature seems to suffer from a 'double mise à l'écart' (Houel 1997: 16). However, as writers of bestsellers and as buyers of books, women are central to the economic viability of the publishing industry. As this thesis will demonstrate, this paradoxical position, the traditional perception of romantic literature as educative and the particular ways in which chick texts' predecessors have been imported into and have impacted – or not – on the system of French literature will have an important influence on the production of chick target texts. As the next section will show, although there are comparatively more female directors and programmers than female writers, many parallels could still be drawn between women's paradoxical position in the literary system and their status in the audiovisual system. Indeed, French cinema and television, in both their production, reception and consumption appear to operate according to the same universalist and elitist principles.

### **3. The French Audiovisual System**

#### **3.1. General Considerations**

##### **3.1.1. Universalism**

The influence of universalism, which – as explained earlier – does not view the concept of social, ethnic, religious or sexual minorities as valid or relevant, is especially evident in the funding, content and reception of cinematic and televisual productions exploring subordinate or marginal identities (Rollet 2004: 175). 'Identity' films, in the same way as 'identity' literature, seem to be perceived as a threat to the cultural universalism of cinema and 'women, beurs and gays are indirectly discouraged from making films dealing with issues that are particular to them' (Rollet 2004: 176). Despite this indirect dissuasion, minorities and especially some women, as section 3.2.4. will show, seem to have overlooked the potential hostility the different content and perspective of their films would meet. In the same

way as internationally and academically acclaimed *écriture féminine* writers appear to remain practically unknown to the French general public, the majority of these French female filmmakers are likely to be found on the professional and artistic margins of the film industry (Forbes 2002: 563). What is more, in the same way as French authors' sales figures reflect their books' ability to appeal to a mixed readership, films directed by women 'are most successful when they address both male and female audiences' (Tarr and Rollet 2001: 283). As I will explain below, this universal commercial imperative has led to the almost invisibility of women-produced and women-oriented films whose content resembles that of chick texts. The unpopularity of these 'women's' films and the critical silence which has surrounded them could be contrasted with the hostile reactions met by female cultural producers who have attempted to re-appropriate traditionally masculine areas such as violence and pornography (or sexual explicitness). As Rollet observes, the controversy generated by films such as *Baise-moi* (which is comparable to that generated by the publication of *La vie sexuelle de Catherine M.*) points to

what the majority of people already take for granted, the idea that there can be a women's cinema or literature. The fact that the scenes filmed or written by women were seen as taboo, although they would not have been perceived in this way if male film-makers had done the same, highlights flagrant contradictions of a universalism that is in fact synonymous with masculine, white, heterosexual and Catholic. (2004: 176)

The consequence of this universal double-standard is that French female producers of culture in general and filmmakers in particular are therefore caught in a cultural double-bind. Female directors can be commercially successful as long as they keep a mixed target audience in mind but must remain on the cultural ground which they are expected to tread as women: soft, frivolous and easy-to-consume entertainment.

The notion of minorities and diversity appears even more problematic in and on French television. Unlike the UK and the US, ethnic minorities have been distinctly absent from the small screen in France (Hecklé 2003: 81)<sup>9</sup>. Their professional

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<sup>9</sup> Some progress has been noted recently, especially since the CSA (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel) report 'La représentation de la diversité des origines et des cultures à la télévision et à la radio. Bilan 2005' released in 2006. However, despite its clear regulatory and sanctioning powers in imposing quotas, notably in the area of French-made programmes, the CSA considers that 'toute

contribution remains unknown as most French channels often refuse to disclose their employees' ethnic background on the grounds that such questions are unimportant, incomprehensible and unacceptable (McGonagle 2002: 289). As opposed to British television which operates according to the principle that 'regionalism sells' (Sergeant 2003: 32), accommodating linguistic and regional diversity on French television is perceived as a threat to social and national cohesion (Sergeant 2003: 32)(Hargreaves 2001: 142) and the universalism of the French language (Moal in Kelly-Holmes 2001: 53). Rollet finds that universalism and commercialism are often intertwined in the discourse of channels' management executives who contend that in France, there are no 'minorités socio-culturelles ou ethniques suffisamment importantes pour donner naissance à des nouveaux medias rentables en termes d'économie de marché' (Bourges in Rollet 2006: 333).

This conception of France as a nation devoid of commercially viable minority publics has two major interrelated implications for the French audiovisual system. First, compared to the US and the rest of Europe, minority-oriented cable and satellite channels have been slow to come into being, held back not only by considerable governmental and political resistance (Kuhn 1995: 204-207) but also by a relative technological tardiness (Goodwin 1999: 99-100). As this chapter and the next will show, this marginalisation of cable and satellite on the French audiovisual system (Kuhn 1995: 204) places the programmes initially imported by and aired on cable and satellite television in an equally marginal position. Secondly, current terrestrial channels in general and private channels in particular aim their programmes at an imagined unique general public, homogenous in its social, ethnic and sexual characteristics. Looking at privately-owned M6 (the only terrestrial channel to have broadcast *AMB* and *SATC*), Hargreaves explains that

because it is a commercially-owned *broadcasting* medium, one of only six terrestrial television channels in France, M6 has to aim for the biggest audience it can get [...]. Most viewers in France are served solely by half a dozen terrestrial channels competing against each other for the biggest possible national audience. This effectively forces television companies to aim for a somewhat mushy middle ground, which in turn almost inevitably condemns minority cultures to the outer fringes of the medium. (Hargreaves 1992: 180)

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disposition, qui, en se réclamant d'une forme de discrimination positive, fixerait des objectifs quantifiés serait contraire aux principes du droit français' (2006: 7).

As I will show in section 3.2.3. and throughout this thesis, a historically strong governmental control (Isar 1999: 16) and this commercially-driven televisual ‘mushy middle ground’ have had a distinct impact not only on the selection of chick texts’ televisual predecessors but also on the adaptation of chick texts themselves. Elitism, to which I will now turn, is also an important factor to consider.

### **3.1.2. Elitism**

The previously discussed rigid distinction between low, commercial and entertaining culture on the one hand and the high, non-lucrative and serious culture on the other operates in the French audiovisual system. French film critics, like their literary counterparts, scorn or avoid reviewing commercially successful ‘undemanding’ productions such as comedies (Tarr and Rollet 2001: 165). As Tarr and Rollet note, women’s most visible achievements in filmmaking have been in the field of comedy (2001: 165), especially by female directors such as Coline Serreau, Diane Kurys, Josiane Balasko or Agnès Jaoui who demonstrate the ability to appeal to a universal ‘genderless’ public (Tarr and Rollet 2001: 283). Commercially successful woman-authored comedies are therefore not new in the French cultural landscape but both the lucrative and comic aspects of these films have tended to define their directors as ‘unworthy’ of much critical praise and academic attention. Elitism and universalism in the system of French cinema thus seem to put commercially successful female film directors in a similar paradoxical position to female writers of entertaining fiction in the system of French literature.

Interestingly, the same paradox seems to exist in the system of French television. Indeed, the gradual feminisation of the French televisual medium at the decision-making and producing level (similar to the Anglo-American phenomenon discussed in Chapter 1, section 2.3.) appears greater in specific areas: entertainment shows, children’s programmes and televisual fiction (Maquelle and Rambert 1991: 59), in other words, in the domains women are socio-culturally expected to master best. There is a striking parallel between the perception of these genres as culturally inferior and the socially subordinate gender of those in charge of their programming and/or production: these programming and producing positions ‘sont confiées aux femmes [...] essentiellement parce que les variétés ont longtemps été considérées

comme un domaine secondaire' (Maquelle and Rambert 1991: 59-60). Although some women have broken into the traditionally masculine field of news reporting (Perry 1997: 129), these cases are rather exceptional (Hayward 1990: 103) and often magnified by what Barré calls the 'effet loupe Cotta/Ockrent/Sinclair' (in Ripa 2002: 77) which 'cache le faible pourcentage de femmes-journalistes parmi les mensualisés (36%) et la majorité féminine des pigistes stagiaires (52%)' (Ripa 2002: 77).

The status of women in television presents three main analogies with the status of women in literature and cinema. Firstly, like French women writers, female journalists, producers and programmers face far more sexist prejudices and systematic criticism for their work than their male counterparts (Maquelle and Rambert 1991: 60-63). In the same way as the 'organigramme du Syndicat national de l'édition' is predominantly male at the upper levels (see 2.1.2.), superior hierarchal positions in television are mainly occupied by men (Maquelle and Rambert 1991: 63). Secondly, in the same way as lucrative women-authored and women-oriented novels fulfil a financially supportive role in the publishing industry, traditionally 'feminine' areas such as children's programmes, entertainment shows and televisual fiction account for over 42% of terrestrial airtime (Mohr 2001: 26). On privately owned terrestrial channels, entertainment and televisual fiction collectively account for 57.6% (Mohr 2001: 30) and the average French viewer is believed to watch more televisual fiction than any other genre (Mohr 2001: 35-37). Although considered culturally inferior, televisual entertainment and fiction constitute a considerable source of advertising revenue and are central to the economic viability of the televisual industry. Thirdly, in the same way as more women buy books, women are the primary consumers of television, watching on average twenty-seven minutes more than men daily (Mohr 2001: 35). As section 3.2.4. will demonstrate, women's predominance either as programmers or consumers has led to an increase of heroine-centred series and telefilms, some of which will be of particular significance to chick texts' introduction into the system of French culture.

The aforementioned rigid distinction between high and low culture is also evident between the two audiovisual media themselves. Cinema is a prestigious art (Perry 1997: 126) while television is considered 'comme un support "impur", inapte à



véhiculer des productions artistiques conçues spécifiquement pour elle' (Winckler 2004a). As Chapter 3 (section 2.4.) will demonstrate, this difference between culturally worthy cinema and unworthy television impacts on the way in which the audiovisual translation of a fictional text is approached. As I will also show below, this perceived difference in cultural value is also likely to have consequences on the importation of chick texts and their position in the French cultural system. As the first twelve episodes of television series *AMB* and the first season of television series *SATC* comprise the largest proportion of this study's corpus, the following section will examine the cultural position of audiovisual fiction in general and televisual fiction in particular.

### **3.2. Audiovisual Fiction**

This section concentrates on the status of domestic and imported televisual fiction before looking at the position of subversive fiction on television, particularly chick texts' subversive prior texts. I conclude on three types of French-produced heroine-centred audiovisual texts.

#### **3.2.1. The Cultural Status of Televisual Fiction**

Fiction has not always occupied a predominant place on French television. Even following the break-up of the former unique channel ORTF into three channels (TF1, Antenne 2 and FR3) in the 1970s, television fiction amounted to only 12% of air-time until the mid-1980s (Chaniac and Jézéquel 1998: 21-22). The privatisation of TF1 in 1987 along with the arrival of two new commercial channels (La Cinq and M6) led to a remarkable growth in the volume of broadcasted fiction across the medium in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Ibid.). Both public and private channels increased their daily airing time and filled their schedules with more fiction to vie for the biggest audience share and more lucrative advertising contracts (Ibid.). Despite the failure and closure of La Cinq in 1992, this trend has not subsided and on its own, fiction now represents around a third of terrestrial airing time (Mohr 2001: 30)(Chaniac and Jézéquel 1998: 22). The tendency to devalue commercially motivated cultural creations in the overall cultural system and the primacy of fiction in the commercial system of a medium considered in itself culturally inferior places televisual fiction in a doubly marginal position.

The imported nature of the majority of series and telefilms marginalises televisual fiction even further. Indeed, by the mid-to-late 1990s, French-made television fiction accounted for less than a fifth of all broadcasted programmes and 70% of televisual imports came from the US (Buonanno 1998: 19). This state of affairs has raised concerns amongst the French cultural and political elite who perceive American imports as a threat to the French language and culture (Perry 1997: 125). The presence of American series and telefilms on French television is also considered to be both the cause and the consequence of channels' struggle to produce long-running quality fictional programmes capable of filling their time slots and competing with the increasing volume of American imports (Chaniac and Jézéquel 1998: 24). Government-inspired quotas imposed by the audiovisual regulatory authority CSA to promote works 'd'expression originale française' have been in place since 1992 (Mohr 2001: 33) but have not always been respected (Perry 1997: 126). Moreover, M6, the French channel most reliant on imported American series, circumvents the imposed minimum of domestically-made programmes by broadcasting French music videos at night time (Kuhn 1995: 201). This means that by the time of chick texts' introduction into the French cultural landscape<sup>10</sup>, fiction aired on French television remained dominated by 57% of American imports (Buonanno 1998: 19).

As well as being perceived as culturally threatening, imported American fictions, especially popular series (which represent 80% of all broadcasted fiction on French television (Beraud in Basle et al 2003: 273)), are treated with ambivalence: their narrative drive and polish are admired but their spectacularisation and superficiality are despised (Crofts 1995: 116). As Crofts notes, this ambivalence stems from a marked distaste for what is seen to be 'the television equivalent of the photo-novel or romance, destined above all to housewives'<sup>11</sup> (Crofts 1995: 116-117). While the French admire the American tendency to apply cinematic techniques in the

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<sup>10</sup> More recently, fines and withdrawal of broadcasting rights seem to have proved successful incentives for channels to see producing and programming French-made fiction as worthwhile investments (Rollet 2006: 335).

<sup>11</sup> A similar, albeit more nuanced, connection is made in Houel, indicating that this is a relatively common interpretation: 'le roman Harlequin s'inscrit dans la lignée du roman d'amour plus que dans celle de la presse du cœur, puisqu'il s'agit d'un livre et non d'un roman-photo. Ce dernier a été détrôné par la télévision, et avantageusement remplacé par des séries tout aussi sentimentales venues d'Amérique du Nord' (1997: 72).

production of televisual fiction<sup>12</sup>, this does not outweigh American series' perceived short-comings: its seriality and imagined target audience – women. Winckler summarises the situation in the following terms:

Il y a un traitement en France des séries américaines qui consiste, qui équivaut à dire: 'les fictions américaines, c'est mauvais donc on les utilise comme bouche-trou'. [...] La France continue à considérer que les fictions en général et les fictions américaines en particulier sont des sous-produits. Et ils en profitent pour remplir leur cases, parce qu'ils ne peuvent pas produire autant. (2004a)

Critically despised as a genre, American fiction is yet central to the economic viability of television channels which can afford neither to reduce their airing time nor to produce as much fiction themselves. This ambivalence partially related to the historically devalued format and the socially devalued gender of its audience, is based on a (mis-)understanding of the genre shaped by the political and cultural conservatism with which American fiction has been selected and adapted for the French small screen (Ibid.). It is in the light of this conservatism that I shall look at the position of subversive fictions and chick texts' subversive predecessors on French television.

### 3.2.2. Subversive Audiovisual Fictions

As previously mentioned, the commercial imperative of addressing the widest possible audience has led to a televisual middle-ground 'mush' aimed at an imagined general public, not only homogenous in its social, ethnic and sexual characteristics but also in its cultural expectations and preferences. In 'Créer des fictions pour la télévision', Kahane and Triboit explain that channels take as few risks as possible and privilege what has formerly been successful to avoid alienating their audience (in Basle et al. 2003: 268-269). Known as *formatage*, this practice

impose l'idée d'un public unique qui se reconnaîtrait nécessairement dans les mêmes choses [et] procède par étiquettes: quand il y a un aveugle dans un film, ce doit être un film qui traite du handicap, une étrangère, de celui de l'exclusion, une histoire d'amour, d'un drame sentimental. Mais faites un film où un aveugle tombe amoureux d'une étrangère: c'est la panique, votre film est taxé d'incohérence, il ne délivre pas un sens clair, le téléspectateur sera perdu et zappera inéluctablement... Cette frilosité traduit au bout du compte un grand mépris des décideurs pour les gens qui regardent la télévision. (in Basle et al. 2003: 268-269)

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<sup>12</sup> Winckler shows that this is a tradition in American television production which one can date back to the first American soap opera *I love Lucy* in 1951 (2004a).

Complexity in thematic content is dismissed as incoherence, for the average television viewer is seen to be impatient and ready to switch channels if the *sens* is not instantly comprehensible. Central to the poetics of televisual fiction, *formatage* excludes novel and complex combinations of themes, echoing the mutual exclusion of sentimentalism and realism in nineteenth-century literature. Interestingly, domestic fictions produced at a time when French television was free from commercial imperatives could be considered relatively bolder from an artistic point of view (Winckler 2004a). As the final section will show, this former creative audacity and *formatage* could explain an initially puzzling characteristic of French television fiction: the predominance of woman-centred crime series.

Importantly, ideological transgressions appear as uncommon as poetological transgressions in fictions produced for French television. Elements which depart from an agreeable and moderate consensus and could potentially trigger a reflection tend to be off limits (Bosséno in Rollet 2006: 335)(Winckler 2004a). Thus, French television viewership is not only imagined to share the same cultural expectations and preferences, it is also expected to share a common set of moral and conventional values which should not be disturbed. Although viewers are perceived – or rather dismissed – as the uneducated lower-class, the ideological beliefs attributed to them ‘au nom de la connaissance qu’elles [television channels] estiment posséder de leur public’ (Groussard 2003: 82) appear to pertain to middle-class values. Hayward (1990: 98), for instance, argues that as an institution, French television is a middle-class construct which reflects the ‘dominant ideology [and] bourgeois hegemony of contemporary France’ (1990: 104). In this ‘most conservative and unforward looking instrument of mass communication’ (Ibid.), imported fictional texts containing subversive elements are most likely to be censored (Winckler 2004a)<sup>13</sup> or to occupy a peripheral position: aired on minor cable and satellite channels (Winckler 2004a) or if on major channels, outside of prime time (Winckler 2004a) or several years after their original broadcast (Winckler 2004). As Winckler shows, as a state-owned and

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<sup>13</sup> In the case of Anglo-American imports, Winckler shows that French television channels often ‘coupent ce qui est provocateur’ (2004a). He gives the example of a recent American telefilm charting the youth and rise of Hitler whose French version was ‘amputée de quarante minutes’ (Ibid). Amongst the passages to be cut were an ambiguous Jewish character and Hitler’s anti-Semitic and anti-terrorist speeches which were viewed, in the United States, as a direct attack on George W. Bush’s government.

state-controlled institution, French television has historically displayed a tendency to exclude the most socially subversive American fictions. As he explains,

la puissante critique sociale exprimée par les séries télévisées américaines de l'époque était insupportable et il n'était pas question de la donner à voir à une population que, depuis 1968, l'on savait capable de contester vigoureusement le pouvoir. La conséquence de cet ostracisme est claire: pendant les années 70, les téléspectateurs français ne connaîtront de la production télévisée américaine que ce que la télévision française veut bien leur montrer. (Ibid.)

Winckler also shows that this selective censorship seems more specific to French television and has not traditionally applied to cinema: provocative and audacious American films could be seen in French cinemas (Ibid.). This paradox suggests an early and institutional opposition between cinema as an appropriate medium through which novelty and creativity could be imported, and television, through which they could not. As I will now show, the practice of excluding or delaying subversive programmes sheds light on the importation and position of chick texts' predecessors in the system of French television.

### 3.2.3. Chick Texts' Televisual Predecessors

A brief look at the importation and position of chick texts' predecessors in the system of French television reveals significant gaps and delays. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* was never broadcast on French television and figures amongst the most subversive American series ignored by the French televisual establishment (Winckler 2004). *Femmes d'Affaires et Dames de Coeur*, the French version of *Designing Women* seems to have solely appeared on the cable channel AB1. The first airing date is unknown but the launch year of AB1, 1995, indicates that there must have been at least nine years between the broadcast of the original series and that of its French version. *Murphy Brown* is a relative exception. Originally aired in 1988 on CBS, the eponymous French version was first broadcast only two years later by M6, the French channel which, as previously mentioned, primarily relied on American imports. However, *Murphy Brown's* presence on French broadcasting television seems short-lived. In Dubreuil's words,

lauréat d'innombrables récompenses dans son pays d'origine, *Murphy Brown* ne connut pourtant pas le même impact chez nous, trouvant timidement sa place sur des réseaux câblés tels que Téva, après une vaine tentative de détrôner le *Cosby Show* sur M6. (2007)

After a brief and unsuccessful period in prime-time position, *Murphy Brown* appears to have regressed to a peripheral position on a cable channel.

As argued in Chapter 1 (section 4.2.2.6.), *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Designing Women* and *Murphy Brown* introduced a number of new poetological elements in the serial genre and prepared the ground for *AMB* and *SATC*. As the following section will show, the absence or limited visibility of these predecessors of chick texts in the system of French television suggests a different type of codified poetics for heroine-centred audiovisual texts.

### 3.2.4. Heroine-centred French Audiovisual Texts

Three types of French-produced audiovisual texts featuring a main female character can be identified: the single woman comedy, the woman-centred crime series and the AB Productions sitcom. Within the field of cinematic comedies, seven heroine-centred films written and directed by women were released in the two decades preceding the introduction of chick texts in the French audiovisual system: *Un homme à ma taille* (1982), *Les surprises de l'amour* (1988), *Pentimento* (1989), *Pas d'amour sans amour* (1992), *Sam Suffit* (1992), *Le journal du séducteur* (1996), *Romaine* (1997) and *La nouvelle Eve* (1999). According to Tarr and Rollet, these films

foreground female characters and comic female performances, address female desires and (often) make a mockery of men who are variously married, gay, violent, inadequate, serial womanisers, or simply unwilling to make a commitment. Furthermore [the] heroines are not isolated from work, home and family, but are mostly working women in their late twenties/early thirties [who] share their experiences with female friends and colleagues. (2001: 174)

As these single woman comedies seem to share a number of poetological components with chick texts, it would be tempting to assume that they influenced or motivated patrons' introduction of chick texts in the French cultural system. However, these texts appear to have been doubly marginalised in the overall system of French cinema. As comedies, they were ignored by the critics who 'dismiss such films as "films de femmes", addressing issues worthy of the letter pages of women's magazines' (Ibid.). As 'women's films', they did not appeal to the general 'universal' public (Ibid.). These films' failure to distinguish themselves either in film reviews or

at the box office places them on the margins of not only the commercial system but also the system of critically acclaimed cinema. This doubly peripheral position is reflected in the responses of initiators who, as Chapter 3 shall demonstrate, perceived the humorous treatment of gender relations as a novelty in women-oriented texts within the poetics of the genre in which they tend to locate chick texts: romance. This tendency to situate chick texts within the romantic genre means that no connection seems to have been made between heroine-centred chick texts and heroine-centred crime series.

The greater proportion of female viewers has not gone unnoticed by programmers (Chaniac and Jézéquel 1998: 31) and lead to an increase of female central and secondary characters in popular and prime time detective fictions in the 1990s (Tarr and Rollet 2001: 227)(Chaniac and Jézéquel 1998). There seem to be three interrelated reasons for this. Firstly, as already mentioned, fiction – an inferior area of programming – has often been delegated to women. The central position of the heroine-centred crime series could thus be said to originate from the gender of both programmers and intended audience. Secondly, a similar correlation has been observed between the rising number of female readers and the rising number of female protagonists in female-authored crime fiction (Barfoot 2007: 52) and the success of heroine-centred crime series could therefore be seen as mirroring that of the *polar féminin* which was particularly visible in the French media in the 1990s (Desnain 2000). The third and last explanation concerns channels' need to reproduce pre-existing popular formulas and formats. Indeed, one can trace back the first heroine-centred fiction dealing with law and order to Claude Chabrol's *Madame le Juge* in 1977 (Tarr and Rollet 2001: 227) at a time when artistic innovation and televisual fiction were perhaps considered less antonymous. Titles of series reveal how the idea of a female investigator has been exploited and replicated *ad infinitum*: *Marie Pervenche* (1984), *Julie Lescaut* (1992), *Le Juge est une femme* (1993), *Une femme d'honneur* (1996), *Femmes de loi* (2000), *Trois femmes flics* (2005). Fictions with professionally successful women in either the police force or the legal profession were therefore not new in the system of television fiction. However, as will become evident in Chapter 4, despite the number of female lawyers in chick texts, *formatage* and the presence of one or several romantic plots in chick texts seem

to have influenced chick texts' French patrons to see a stronger poetological connection with a very specific televisual fiction which I will now explore: the AB Productions sitcom.

Created in 1977, AB was initially a children-oriented music production company (Alexandre 1993). An early collaboration with Dorothée, a female singer and programme presenter for children led to the production and broadcast of the successful children's programme *Club Dorothée* in 1987 when newly privatised TF1 offered Dorothée the management of the channel's youth programming (Ibid.). Dorothée, who would remain in this position for ten years, exemplifies the 'place de plus en plus prépondérante qu'occupent les femmes au sein de la télévision' (Maquelle and Rambert 1991: 59). It was under her management and the advice of another woman, Catherine Grandcoing 'conseiller [sic.] pour la jeunesse' (Alexandre 1993) that the channel started broadcasting – via the *Club Dorothée* – a number of AB Productions sitcoms in 1989. *Hélène et les garçons* (hereafter *Hélène*), first broadcast in 1992, soon became the most famous of these sitcoms and the one which seems to have served as a model for subsequent AB Productions series (Chaniac and Jézéquel 1998: 33). The existence of *Hélène* in the system of French television could also be explained by the introduction of CSA quotas imposing a minimum of broadcasting and producing of French-produced programmes on channels in 1992.

Although the origins of *Hélène* might not render a comparison with chick texts obvious, seven similarities emerge between this French-produced series and Anglo-American chick texts. A record-viewing series with 52% of market shares, *Hélène* was first of all an important source of advertising revenue for TF1 (Alexandre 1993). Secondly, in the same way as chick texts have led to a cultural phenomenon and polarised responses, *Hélène* led to a 'véritable phénomène culturel' (Pasquier 1994: 125) and sparked a similar debate 'pour ou contre *Hélène*' (Ibid.). Thirdly, like chick texts, the series morphed into a multimodal and autobiographical celebrity phenomenon: real biographical elements regarding actors were integrated into their characters' names, profiles and story-lines (Pasquier 1998: 217) while books, fan magazines and fan clubs provided more details about the lives of actors and actresses (Pasquier 1994: 140-141). The lead actress, Hélène Rolles, became a singer, sold



600,000 albums and toured in concert throughout the country (Pasquier 1994: 141-142)(Alexandre 1993). Fourthly, like chick texts, characters/celebrities were presented to the public as ordinary and accessible: normal individuals, as Rolles would sing, ‘comme les autres’ (Pasquier 1994: 142) leading lives similar to that of the public ‘comme la vôtre’ (Ibid.). Fifthly, *Hélène*, like most AB Productions sitcoms, was visually dominated by a combination of soft and bright colours<sup>14</sup>, drawing on the American campus and cafeteria setting (Pasquier 1994: 127) and creating ‘pastel-shaded versions of an imagined French-Californian space’ (Hayward 2002: 495). As the next chapter will demonstrate, this visual connection will have a distinct impact on the way in which chick texts were initially packaged upon their introduction into the French book market. Sixthly, *Hélène* is a predominantly heroine-centred and female-oriented text with women and girls representing up to ‘90% du marché’ (Alexandre 1993) Seventhly, like chick texts, *Hélène* features romantic plots and subplots: the narrative focuses on a central female character and her group of friends whose romantic intrigues are reshuffled to offer endless combinations (Chaniac and Jézéquel 1998: 33).

Chick texts and *Hélène* thus share a significant amount of common traits at the level of reception and poetics. However, as a French-produced romantic text, *Hélène* displays characteristics which are typical of the dominant poetics of the romantic genre in France. An important poetological feature is sentimentalist drama:

désir, soupçon, rivalité, tromperie, rupture, réconciliation, pardon, rancune, jalousie, douleur, chaque nouvelle situation et la gamme de sentiment qui en relève est déclinée à travers ses répercussions sur les différents personnages de la série. (Pasquier 1994: 132-133)

As a ‘roman rose télévisuel’ (Pasquier 1994: 137), the series abides by a number of poetological conventions present in the nineteenth-century sentimental novel, the moral romance and the Harlequin romance: the issue of sex is approached with extreme prudery (Pasquier 1994: 131); the representation of heterosexuality respects specific moral values (Pasquier 1994: 135); and characterisation relies on simplified binary oppositions between the faithful and kind heroine and ‘la peste qui ne pense

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<sup>14</sup> Soft and bright colours are understood here as complementing rather than opposing each other as colours culturally associated with femininity and frivolity as opposed to muted and dark colours which tend to convey rigidity and seriousness.

qu'à voler les fiancés des autres' (Pasquier 1998: 220). Characterisations and interpretations also operate according to a double standard: sexual transgressions, notably hypersexuality are 'beaucoup plus souvent reprochée[s] aux personnages féminins qu'aux personnages masculins' (Ibid.). Like its romantic predecessors, *Hélène* shows a distinct disregard for social accuracy and relevance:

les problèmes de sociétés sont refoulés aux portes de Paris-XIV [the fictional campus in which the series is set], que ce soit dans leurs dimensions globales ou dans leur répercussions particulières. [...] Rien de ce qui fait l'actualité sociale ne pénètre dans l'univers d'*Hélène*. (Pasquier 1994: 128)

*Hélène* thus combines a literary tradition and a televisual practice. As a televisual fiction, the series not only follows the previously discussed practice of *formatage*, which excludes the combination of themes, but also avoids potentially disruptive and socially relevant topics. As a romantic text, its protagonists live in a 'huis-clos où ne se traitent que des relations amicales et amoureuses' (Pasquier 1998: 217), enabling the characters, and by extension the viewers, to perform 'une initiation aux sentiments' (Ibid.). This is because, like its romantic predecessors, *Hélène* is aimed at young females aged between four and twenty-four (Alexandre 1993) for whom the series is seen to provide 'une éducation sentimentale' (Pasquier 1994) and 'l'apprentissage des rôles féminins dans la France des années 90' (Parienty 2000).

As a romance and a televisual fiction, *Hélène* also bears the stigmas attached to its doubly-despised format and this was reflected in the low production costs of each episode: a meagre 500,000 Francs (Alexandre 1993). Although this had made the series one of the most competitive and lucrative programmes on French television (Ibid.), the lack of sustainable resources eventually led to its demise (Chaniac and Jézéquel 1998: 33). Yet, despite its decreasing popularity and its disappearance from French television in 1995, *Hélène*'s initial success clearly reinforced the central poetological elements of the romantic genre. *Hélène*, the actress/singer/celebrity/heroine had a distinct impact on the French public's imagination, figuring amongst the twenty most famous French celebrities of 1993 and leading *The Sunday Times* to ask if she was 'the new French Bardot?' (in Pasquier 1994: 125). The series has become synonymous with romance and relationships. For instance, the aforementioned single girl comedy *Romaine* (1997)

by Agnès Obadia consisted of three parts whose titles clearly parodied that of the famous series: *Romaine et les garçons*, *Romaine et les filles* and *Romaine et Romaine* (Tarr and Rollet 2001: 175). One French review of the cinematic adaptation of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* in 1996 reveals the extent to which the AB sitcom and sentimentalism have been associated. Tellingly entitled 'Austen et les garçons', it equates Austen with the series: 'des jeunes filles de bonne famille guettent les jeunes gens *clean* qui feront de bons maris (*Hélène et les garçons* au temps des rois George)' (Devarrieux in Cossy 2004: 355). French cultural critics in the mid-1990s therefore placed *Hélène* next to the inconsequential and moral sentimentalism that Austen is perceived to have initiated. Despite the obvious differences in historical periods, cultural origins, and, of course, forms, Austen and *Hélène* are used here to devalue each other. In the light of Austen's previously discussed interpretation, importation and manipulation in the system of French literature, it could be suggested that Austen is perceived, from a French point of view, as the AB sitcom's cultural predecessor. As a televisual descendant and thus a modernised version of Austen, the AB sitcom emerges as the most recent and central type of romantic fiction in the 1990s until, as the next chapter will show, the publication and airing of chick target texts.

#### 4. Conclusion

This overview of the cultural system by which and into which chick texts have been imported reveals many paradoxes. The concepts of elitism and universalism seem to operate across French culture, maintaining commercial entertainment and texts for, by and about women in a peripheral position. A closer look at the lucrative value of these texts, however, reveals that their existence and success are central to the economic viability of the cultural industries. The traditional mutual exclusion of sentimentalism and realism in French poetics and the common monothematic *formatage* in television have led to cultural and institutional practices and interpretations which place fictional heroine-centred texts with at least one romantic plot in the romantic genre and expect such texts to avoid socially relevant issues and

ideologically subversive themes. There is also a strong expectation that such texts – regardless of their literary or audiovisual form – should provide young women with morally appropriate models of feminine and heterosexual behaviour. These expectations have been shown to shape the way in which a number of chick texts’ generic predecessors, from Jane Austen to Harlequin, have been interpreted, selected, adapted and received in the French literary system. If a predecessor of chick texts is selected for reasons beyond its romance element (its author’s international fame or its theme’s topicality), this text is likely to be positioned outside of the romantic genre, in a more general or male-oriented category. The concept of generic category and the notion of *formatage* also seem to have affected the way in which professionally successful women are fictionally represented in France. Images of strong competent women in prime time crime television appear to exist in a vacuum and do not seem to have filtered into other genres. Moreover, the most subversive Anglo-American series in which such women appear tend to have been absent or peripheral on French television.

As commercial and entertaining texts for women, about women and very often by women, chick texts are likely to have been positioned, as some of their predecessors have been, in a doubly marginal position. With the exception of culturally marginal and commercially unsuccessful single girl comedies, chick texts seem to combine themes and features which do not tend to be combined in France. Like the majority of imported Anglo-American feminine texts, a degree of selection and rewriting might be needed for the texts to conform to the dominant poetics and ideology. The next chapter deals with this process of selection and adaptation, concentrating on the motivations behind the initiation and production of chick target texts (or chick TTs). Drawing parallels with the findings of this chapter, the next chapter explores in what respect chick texts were perceived as innovative and the extent to which pre-existing texts such as the mass-market romance and the AB Productions sitcom influenced translational, editorial and marketing decisions made towards chick TTs.

## Chapter Three

### Target Texts: Patrons, Function and Production

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter explores the specific circumstances of the introduction and production of chick TTs. While Chapter 2 provided a general picture of the system into which translated chick texts have been introduced, this chapter ‘zooms in’ and closely examines the initiation, function and production of chick TTs as a process involving a series of roles and players. I focus here on the patrons (or initiators) of chick TTs: their profile, their selecting, commissioning and editing styles, their understanding of a successful target text, their circulating and marketing practices and their ultimate aims for chick TTs. Here, integrating Holz-Mänttari’s translational action model and the *skopos* theory in the wider systemic framework of this thesis has enabled me to fill an important methodological gap: as most descriptive and systemic case studies tend to deal with translation texts which are remote in time, identifying the circumstances of commission and production often relies upon archives and other written sources. This leaves little guidance on how to study texts whose commissioners are still alive and accessible despite the overlap between the role of the patrons (as defined by Lefevere) and that of the initiators (as defined by functionalists) which was previously explained in the General Introduction (section 2).

Holz-Mänttari views translation as a purpose-driven process connecting agents with specific roles, three of which are of direct relevance to this chapter: the initiator/commissioner who needs the translation and contacts the translator; the ST producer who writes the ST; and the TT producer who translates the ST (Holz-Mänttari in Munday 2003: 77). Placing translation within its socio-cultural context, Holz-Mänttari sees the direct interplay between the translator and the initiating

institution as central to the translating process (Munday 2003: 78). Complementing the translational action model is the *skopos* theory which I have outlined in the general introduction.

To understand the initiating institutions and individuals and the commissioned producers of chick TTs, I draw on annual reports and *bilans* as well as interviews conducted from April to September 2006 with the first French editors of translated chick lit: Tony Cartano, the editor-in-chief of foreign literature at the publishing house Albin Michel who commissioned and edited the French translations of *BJD* and *SATC*; Florent Massot, the editor-in-chief and manager of the former publishing house Florent Massot présente who commissioned and edited the French translation of Jane Green's *MM*; Carine Fannius, the editor-in-chief of J'ai lu's series 'Comédie' which republished both *BJD* and *MM* in *poche* format; and Béatrice Duval, the editor-in-chief of Fleuve Noir and creator of the series 'Comédie' who commissioned and edited the French translations of *MLOP* and *TDWP*. This chapter also draws on interviews conducted in August 2006 and April 2007 with a number of agents specifically involved in the production of the dubbed versions of the series *SATC* and *AMB*: Gaëlle Vaquero, production manager at Médiadub; Pascale and Giles Gatineau<sup>1</sup>, spotters and dubbing authors who have worked on both series; and Marie-Frédérique Hébert and Georges Caudron, two actors who dubbed the voices of Miranda Hobbes and Stanley Blatch in *SATC*. Section 2 summarises Reiss's functionalist text typology and introduces some of the main distinctive features of literary and audiovisual translation, subtitling and dubbing and the dubbing of televisual and cinematic texts. Section 3 determines the *skopos* of chick TTs by identifying the factors most likely to affect it: the profile of chick TTs' initiators; their perception of the STs; and their general aims for the TTs in the target system. Finally, section 4 looks at the specific translational and marketing actions which have been undertaken in order to achieve these aims.

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<sup>1</sup> As Pascale and Giles Gatineau joined the dubbing team for these series from season 2 onwards, they were unable to shed light on the specific episodes analysed in Chapters 4 and 5 but they provided valuable information and insight about what writing the French dubbed versions of *SATC* and *AMB* involved. The reason why most of the dubbing authors working on *SATC* and *AMB* were replaced after the first season remains problematically unclear and shrouded in a cloak of professional confidentiality and solidarity.

## 2. General Considerations

### 2.1. Reiss's Typology

Borrowing from Bühler's categorisation of language, Reiss distinguishes between three types of texts: informative 'content-focused' texts whose function is to communicate facts; expressive 'form-focused' texts which aim to be creative; and operative 'appellative-focused' texts whose purpose is to appeal to their receiver and to induce a behavioural response from him/her (2000: 160-171). Functions can, of course, co-exist within one text. Seemingly simplistic, Reiss's typology is yet useful when analysing texts and translations in relation to their context of production and their perceived function in the target system. If there is a *Funktionskonstanz* or functional constancy between the ST and the TT (in other words, if the *skopos* is the same for both texts) (Reiss and Vermeer in Schäffner 2001: 236), informative texts should be translated in plain prose, the translation of an expressive text should adopt the perspective of the ST producers and translators of operative texts should aim for 'adaptive' equivalent effect (Reiss 2000: 160-171). Vermeer argues that functional constancy seems to be the exception rather than the rule (2000: 228) but as this chapter will demonstrate, *Funktionskonstanz* and its conceptual opposite *Funktionsänderung* (change of function between the ST and the TT) (Reiss and Vermeer in Schäffner 2001: 236) are not mutually exclusive but can apply to different co-existing elements within one translational situation. As Nord notes, each text is located within a configuration of specific elements whose constellation determines the text's function (1991: 24). If a single element changes, the constellation inevitably changes as well (Ibid.). In the case of translation, contending that a 'pure' functional constancy between the ST and the TT can exist seems untenable. As Nord explains, there is always one different element which motivates the translation: the different recipient (Ibid.). Even if the TT recipient was the exact replica of the ST recipient in every aspect (such as gender, age, education and class), there would still be a small but significant difference: the ST and TT recipients live in different linguistic and cultural communities (Ibid.). As section 3 will show, this inevitably brings other small differences to the function of a TT which may still retain a degree of functional constancy with its ST. As sections 2.3 and 2.4. will

demonstrate, a functionalist typology of texts can productively identify the perceived differences between texts and modes of translation within the audiovisual field. Before turning to these differences, I shall give an overview of the differences and similarities between literary and audiovisual translation.

## **2.2. Literary and Audiovisual Translation**

The first noteworthy difference between the translation of a literary text and that of an audiovisual text concerns the number of agents involved. While the production of a literary translation typically involves two agents – an editor and a translator – audiovisual translation can consist of as many as eleven stages (Luyken et al. 1991: 77). In France, the production of a dubbed version, for instance, involves many agents: a production manager who oversees the entire process and devises schedules; at least one spotter whose responsibility is to identify lip movements; at least one dubbing author who produces the dubbed version in the target language; a *directeur artistique* who casts and directs dubbing actors and ensures the consistency of the dubbed version; a calligrapher who transcribes the dubbing authors' text; dubbing actors; sound engineers; and as will be explained later, a *superviseur* in the case of cinematic texts (Savdié in Justamand 2006c: 68).

Two further interrelated distinctions have emerged in the responses of the dubbing professionals interviewed for this research. While literary translators could expect a range of training opportunities from university courses and schools, equivalent opportunities for dubbing authors are rarer. Moreover, some members of the dubbing profession, such as Pascale and Giles Gatineau, view audiovisual translation schools as inappropriate and unnecessary. The reasons they advance show a tendency to see their work as radically different from literary translators. To them, audiovisual translation students

ne savent écrire que de la littérature. On ne leur apprend qu'à traduire, et à poser de la littérature, le dialogue, ça ne s'apprend pas [...]. Ça fait partie de ces boulots, vous naissez avec ou vous ne l'avez pas. C'est très instinctif. [Audiovisual translation students] traduisent très bien, ils ont un bel anglais, un bon français mais pour de la littérature. Ils font de très bonnes adaptations, mais de livres. Et ça ne se parle pas. (05/04/2007)



Pascale and Giles Gattineau's words here point to a common notion in the professional field of dubbing: 'le sens du dialogue est crucial' (Savdié in Justamand 2006c: 65). In a profession where the *skopos* of the dubbed version is to maintain the oral nature of a text, the ability to translate written and literary texts does not constitute an advantage. Pascale and Giles Gattineau's response also suggests a belief that writing dubbed versions of audiovisual texts is not a learned skill but an innate and instinctive one. Having been in direct contact with audiovisual translation students, they go as far as contending that students are given false hope and 'n'iront pas loin dans le métier' (05/04/2007). Savdié, another dubbing author, is not as dismissive of audiovisual translation schools but does note that their graduates are not very visible in the field (in Justamand 2006c: 67) and that formal training is not necessary: newcomers 'se forment souvent sur le tas' (Ibid.). If writing a dubbed version is not considered a 'natural' skill by all, personal qualities and experience seem to matter more than academic qualifications.

Of course, the view according to which translation is 'a gift: you either have it or you do not' (Baker 2002: 3) is not limited to French dubbing authors and was still held amongst some professional translators in the early 1990s (Ibid.). As Baker shows, the perception of translation as an art seems to stem from a confusion over what translation is and, until recently, from the absence of theoretical components in translation courses (2002: 1-3). According to Baker, translation as a profession has been under-recognised precisely because translators' decisions have long been understood to be intuitive and theory has remained a 'dirty' word in some translation circles (Ibid.). Fortunately, the growth of a formalised pool of knowledge in the last two decades has enabled translation students and practitioners to reflect on their activity. However, the tendency to dismiss academic training and theory as irrelevant to translation practice, as noted by Baker in the early 1990s, seems to encapsulate Pascale and Giles Gattineau's view of audiovisual translation courses in 2007.

The continued adherence to the idea that writing dubbed versions of audiovisual texts is a purely innate talent leads to the depreciation of theoretical training which could explain why Audiovisual Translation (AVT) as an academic discipline has remained relatively limited in French universities. Unlike Italy and Spain, there are few case

studies and academic accounts of AVT in France. Accounts by Francophone academics do exist but are primarily published outside of France and in languages other than French<sup>2</sup>. Although it is not within the scope of this research to provide a general theory of the French practice of dubbing, it should be noted that French professional accounts as well as studies carried out in culturally related countries such as Italy point to a milieu in which individuals' personal contacts<sup>3</sup> (Savdié in Justamand 2006c)(Pascale and Giles Gatineau 05/04/2007)(Vaquero 28/08/2006)(Denis 28/08/2006) and what Chiaro calls 'polyvalent figures' (2007: 275) are important. Polyvalence could be defined as the professional ability to be involved at more than one of the eleven dubbing stages identified by Luyken et al. (1991: 77). The accumulation of several roles and the evolution from one role to another over one's career seem relatively common amongst the dubbing professionals interviewed for this research<sup>4</sup>. Practices also vary from one dubbing author to the next (Pascale and Giles Gatineau 05/04/2007)(Denis 28/08/2006). The orality of dubbed versions, the string-pulling nature of recruitment, the commonness of polyvalence and personal practices seem to contribute to the marginality of dubbing as a legitimate object of academic study in France. Moreover, French academia displays a tendency noted by Delabastita as regards the academic status of translated mass media in the early 1990s: despite the importance of mass media forms in shaping cultures, cultural prestige, rather than interest, prevails in the selection of objects of study (1990: 97). Given the less prestigious status of a derivative phenomenon such as translation, translations of canonised literary works are likely to be preferred over translations of soap operas (Ibid.).

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<sup>2</sup> See Bartrina (2004: 166-167). The French collection of interviews *Rencontres autour du doublage des films et des séries télé* on which this chapter draws seems to be the first of its kind. Tellingly, it was not compiled by academics but by dubbing professionals.

<sup>3</sup> To give a few examples: the fathers of dubbing authors Joël Savdié, Valérie Denis and Giles Gatineau were dubbing authors themselves. Pascale Gatineau started working as a dubbing author thanks to her husband Giles. Gaëlle Vaquero's son became a dubbing actor thanks to his mother.

<sup>4</sup> The dubbing authors Pascale and Giles Gatineau carry out the spotting themselves (Pascale and Giles Gatineau 05/04/2007). Giles Gatineau's father was a dubbing author but also a renowned dubbing actor who notably lent his voice to Michael London (Ibid.). Georges Caudron works as a dubbing actor and as a dubbing and casting director for television series, telefilms and films (Caudron 28/08/2006). A sound engineer may become a dubbing director (Vaquero 28/08/2006). The dubbing author Valérie Denis started her career as a spotter (Denis 28/08/2006).

Translation also seems to suffer from a similar institutional isolation in France as it does in Anglo-American cultures (Venuti 1998: 1-4). In this respect, literary translation and audiovisual translation display a number of commonalities. Their practitioners – literary and audiovisual translators – tend to be freelance and to work from home. These ‘solitary conditions’ (Venuti 1998: 4) are often positively perceived as a lifestyle choice: translators avoid the constraints of working *en entreprise* (Duval 03/05/2006)(Vaquero 28/08/2006) and preserve their anonymity whilst still fulfilling a creative role in the media (Gatineau 05/04/2007). However, there is a sense that the home-based nature of translating work marginalises translators’ status (Duval 03/05/2006)(Vaquero 28/08/2006) and contributes to their profession’s ‘invisibility’ (Venuti 1997). Literary and audiovisual translators, especially those dealing with popular fiction, are generally expected to work fast (Duval 03/05/2006)(Vaquero 28/08/2006), a situation which greatly limits their time for revision and research (Aixela 1996: 67). The verification of TTs within initiating institutions does not seem to take into account the ‘linguistic and cultural differences a translation must negotiate’ (Venuti 1998: 6) and if verifying occurs, the emphasis appears to be on the French syntax and vocabulary or, in the case of dubbed versions, the quality of the sound and that of the actor’s delivery (Cartano 23/08/2006)(Massot 04/09/2006)(Vaquero 28/08/2006).

I would like to suggest, as Venuti does, that the practices of literary and audiovisual translation tend to be invisible and isolated because the revelations they occasion ‘question the authority of dominant cultural values and institutions’ (1998: 1). Indeed, if, as Bassnett argues, the practice of translation imposes meaning while concealing the power relations involved in the production of that meaning (1998: 136), the study of translation involves a comparative perspective which can reveal the ‘asymmetries, inequities, relations of domination and dependence [which] exist in every act of translating’ (Venuti 1998: 4). This could explain why dubbing has been the preferred mode of audiovisual translation over subtitling in some countries: dubbing restricts target recipients’ access to the source system whilst subtitles enable a comparison between source and target systems (Bassnett 1998: 136-137). The following section will further explore the differences between subtitling and dubbing in a primarily ‘dubbing country’ (Lukyan et al. 1991: 30) such as France.

### 2.3. Subtitling and Dubbing

The differences between subtitling and dubbing could be divided into two categories: production-related and function-related. At the level of production, the most oft-cited differences are financial and technical. Because dubbing requires much more labour (see section 2.2.) it is, on average, fifteen times more expensive than subtitles (Baker and Hochel 2001: 247). According to Médiadub, direction and performance represent 60% of the overall budget for the dubbing of an audiovisual product (Vaquero 28/08/2006). This is close to the percentage estimated by Lukyen et al.: 50% (1991: 103). Lukyen's analysis of cost structure also reveals an interesting discrepancy in cost distribution between subtitling and dubbing: while the translators' salaries or fees tend to represent 60% of the overall cost of a subtitled version, the dubbing authors' salaries or fees tend to account for only 14% of the total dubbing budget (Ibid.). For Médiadub, this percentage is even lower: 10% (Vaquero 28/08/2006). The perennial technical constraint of synchronisation (Bellone in Justamand 2006a: 72)(Vaquero 28/08/2006) is perhaps one of the most debatable differences between subtitles and dubbing. Subtitling teams are equally bound to constraints, notably the limited space and time for their text to appear (Gottlieb 2001: 247). Baker and Hochel also observe that matching sounds to lip movements is only necessary when the speaker's mouth is fully visible and closed when labial and semi-labial consonants are pronounced (2001: 75).

At the level of function, one of the major differences between the two audiovisual translation methods is the cultural prestige. Subtitles are often thought to be a more 'authentic method' (Gottlieb 2004: 87) and dubbing is often referred to as the 'imperfect art' (Lukyen et al. 1991: 71). In France, subtitling is limited to narrowcasting of imports whose target recipients are seen to be 'the better educated and more affluent, as well as students and other intellectual minorities' (Luyken in Baker and Hochel 2001: 76). In the case of solely subtitled imports, subtitling is synonymous with a specific elitist 'niche': the *film d'art* (Danan in Gottlieb 2004: 82). In contrast, 90% of audiovisual imports are released dubbed (Lukyen et al. 1991: 30) for a public believed to find reading subtitles too onerous a task (Bellone in Justamand 2006a: 72).

In the light of the differences in target audiences, the major differences between subtitles and dubbing could be explained through the *skopos* and text type theory. Subtitles aim to provide for ‘ceux qui comprennent un peu la langue originale’ (Barclay in Justamand 2006b: 88) and want access to the content of the ST. The *skopos* of subtitles could thus be said to be informative and educational. In the case of subtitled entertaining audiovisual texts (such as Hollywood blockbusters or American sitcoms), one could talk of *Funktionsänderung* or change of function between STs and TTs. Although subtitles might also entertain an intellectual minority, their *skopos* is likely to remain informative and translational strategies are likely to privilege plain, concise and germane forms in order to achieve this informative aim. Within the dubbing industry, the plainness, conciseness and informativeness of subtitles are perceived to make them unable to convey the original actors’ emotional state (Barclay in Justamand 2006b: 88). In contrast, dubbed versions are believed to be preferred by the broadest section of the population who ‘souhaite retrouver les mêmes émotions que dans l’original’ (Ibid.). In other words, dubbed versions do not necessarily aim to be informative and educational and the need to induce the *same* emotional and/or behavioural responses in target viewers could define dubbing as an appellative-focused method. One could thus advance that in France, dubbing is generally perceived as the only way to achieve a *Funktionskonstanz* between an operative ST and an operative TT. In order to achieve this functional constancy, adaptive strategies aiming at producing a perceived equivalent effect (such as laughter, sympathy, or identification) therefore tend to be preferred. As Goris shows, the choice of dubbing over subtitling, the claim that dubbing attracts larger audiences and the translational strategies dubbing entails are not ideologically disconnected factors (1993). All could be linked to the wider historical and social context in which standard French has been used to reinforce political and cultural centralisation (Goris 1993: 171). In this context French dubbing ‘works as “control mechanism”’ (Ibid.). As section 4.1.3. will show, this has a distinct impact on the treatment of ideologically different values in the production of dubbed TTs.

The difference in *skopos* and translational strategies between subtitles and dubbing means that dubbing professionals view their work as essentially different from that of

subtitlers. From a dubbing point of view, subtitlers ‘traduisent tout bêtement’ (Vaquero 28/08/2006) and their subtitling experience is not particularly relevant to the work of a dubbing author<sup>5</sup> (Ibid.). In other words, compared to dubbing authors, subtitlers are seen to manage a simple informative transfer of content rather than a complex adaptive one. Interviewed professionals in Médiadub regularly insisted upon the fact that a dubbed version was an adaptation, not a translation. A dubbed TT is produced by an *adaptateur* or an *auteur* and the title *traducteur* is rarely used in the industry (Savdié in Justamand 2006c: 65)(Sarhou 2006: 223). Adaptive strategies are especially frequent in the dubbing process of televisual texts where the dubbing company is accountable to the French channel which will broadcast the TT. In the dubbing of cinematic texts, however, a new type of accountability has recently emerged and practices and translational strategies have subsequently evolved. The following section explores these recent developments and the ensuing differences between television and cinema in the practice of dubbing.

#### 2.4. Television and Cinema

As mentioned earlier, 90% of all audiovisual imports, including cinematic texts, are released dubbed in France. Most Anglo-American films would thus undergo the process of dubbing before being shown on French cinema screens. Although the technique is essentially the same for both films and television (Vaquero 28/08/2006), the working conditions are relatively different. This is principally due to the fact that, in the case of cinematic texts, ST producers tend to be more involved in the production of TTs. Indeed, a *superviseur* whose role is to ‘veiller à ce que l’intégrité du film et des personnages soit respectée’ (Taïeb in Justamand 2006: 97) is employed by the original film’s distributor or director (Taïeb in Justamand 2006: 94-95). According to Savdié, the emergence of film supervisors has been one of the most important developments in the profession in the last few years and one which has greatly contributed to the increasing faithfulness of French dubbed versions of cinematic texts (in Justamand 2006c: 68). Indeed, film supervisors have the authority to change any aspect of a film’s dubbed version with which they disagree (Barclay in

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<sup>5</sup> Evidence suggests that some audiovisual translators do work on both dubbing and subtitling assignments (Savdié in Justamand 2006c: 65)(Sarhou 2006: 223) although more research would be needed to determine which of the two methods is acquired first and whether dubbing experience is seen as irrelevant to the practice of subtitling.

Justamand 2006b: 82). They are often American or British (Taïeb in Justamand 2006: 96) and impose what French dubbing professionals perceive as unrealistic demands on their work: ‘qu’on ne touche pas au produit tel qu’il a été conçu au départ’ (Gatineau 05/04/2007). Film supervisors request a TT as semantically close to the ST as possible: a French dialogue ‘traduit presque mot à mot par rapport au dialogue original’ (Barclay in Justamand 2006b: 82), in other words, ‘la même chose qu’en anglais’ (Taïeb in Justamand 2006: 96). The presence of film supervisors could thus be considered to limit major departures from the original meaning in the production of dubbed TTs.

Televsual texts seem to be rarely supervised in this manner for, as already mentioned, the ultimate authority on a dubbed TT of a television series or film lies with the French broadcasting channel which has purchased, but not produced, the text. Paradoxically, this situation is perceived to provide greater creative freedom to dubbing professionals and informs the career choices of some, notably those who have been involved in the dubbing of *AMB* and *SATC*: Catherine Le Lann, the dubbing director and Pascale and Giles Gatineau, two of the dubbing authors (Vaquero 28/08/2006)(Gatineau 05/04/2007). Pascale and Giles Gatineau, for instance, prefer not to work on cinematic texts because they do not enjoy ‘traduire’ and ‘poser textuellement’. According to them,

il y a beaucoup moins de boulot d’adaptation dans le cinéma [et] l’intérêt de notre métier, la façon dont nous, on le pratique, c’est justement, [...] de trouver les mots qui vont permettre qu’on ait l’impression qu’ils parlent français, donc d’utiliser des synonymes. Chose qu’ils ne font pas au cinéma ou très rarement. (Ibid.)

Here, the function of a cinematic text’s dubbed version singularly echoes that of subtitles. Like subtitling, the activity of writing a dubbed version of a cinematic text is reduced to a simple textual reproduction which does not involve as much adaptation, ‘synonyms’ and French-sounding characters as a televsual text. The dubbed version of a film is thus perceived as less appellative-focused than the dubbed version of a television series and, as far as translational strategies are concerned, one could suggest that adaptive ‘equivalent’ effects are more frequent in dubbed televsual texts than in dubbed cinematic texts.

Another related distinction between dubbing for the cinema and dubbing for television is the difference of prestige within the dubbing industry. Dubbing for the cinema seems to command not only more respect but also higher fees. According to Médiabub (which only deals with televisual texts), when dubbing actors, directors and authors work for both the television industry and the film industry, they tend to give priority to the latter over the former (Vaquero 28/08/2006). As Vaquero explains, this behaviour tends to be financially risky as cinema contracts are rarer and despite being less prestigious and less lucrative, dubbing for television provides more regularity (Ibid.). Although lesser paid, writing the dubbed versions of television series is considered to be more difficult: because of the high quantity of episodes, dubbing authors are required to work fast and as part of a team of several authors with potentially different styles and approaches (Savdié in Justamand 2006c: 67). Unlike dubbing authors of cinematic texts or even television films, dubbing authors of television series also have to deal with the awkwardness of not knowing how the intrigue will be resolved (Ibid.).

As this thesis aims to identify the intervention of poetics and ideology in chick TTs, the differences between subtitles and dubbing and between dubbed televisual texts and dubbed cinematic texts have been of particular relevance when setting the parameters of the comparative analysis presented in Chapters 4 and 5. The less adaptive nature of dubbing cinematic texts (due to the ST producers' involvement) means that the French dubbing of the film *BJD* yielded fewer adaptive strategies than the dubbed versions of the series *AMB* and *SATC*. As the information-focused function of subtitles tends to lead to a more accurate reflection of the ST's content and this informative accuracy is believed to be primarily of interest to an intellectual minority, the subtitles of chick audiovisual texts will not be the focal point of Chapters 4 and 5. However, as they tend to provide interesting linguistic alternatives to the dubbed versions, the subtitles of the examples analysed will be occasionally referred to and have been included in Appendices 19 and 20 for further reference. The decision to explore the literary translation of chick lit novels and the dubbed versions of chick audiovisual texts has been informed by the commonalities (discussed in section 2.2.) between the translation of popular fiction and the dubbing of audiovisual fiction, notably television fiction. Indeed, despite their previously



mentioned differences, the practices of translating popular fiction and dubbing for television seem to present three shared characteristics whose socio-cultural implications cannot be neglected, especially in the light of their differences from subtitled texts and dubbed cinematic texts. Firstly, unlike the dubbing of a cinematic text, neither process involves the ST producer. Secondly, unlike subtitled texts, translated popular fiction and dubbed television fiction do not tend to allow access to the original text<sup>6</sup>. Thirdly, both translated popular literature and dubbed television fiction are aimed at the broadest section of the population. As section 4 will show, the notion of *grand public* has had an important impact on translational actions. Since ‘projects are initiated in the domestic culture, where a foreign text is selected to satisfy different tastes from those that motivated its composition and reception in its native culture’ (Venuti 1998: 11), the following section concentrates on the process of initiation, particularly on the patrons of chick TTs and the tastes and aims chick TTs have been seen to satisfy and fulfil.

### **3. The *Skopos***

This section examines the *skopos* of chick TTs, focusing on the general profile of the initiators of translated chick lit and their definition of chick texts’ text type and genre as well as their general aims in producing chick TTs. I here focus on the specific tastes and aspects which have overlapped or conflicted with those which originally motivated the composition and reception of chick STs in Anglo-American cultures.

#### **3.1. Patrons**

##### **3.1.1. Female**

Although not every chick lit novel analysed in this study was directly edited by a woman, a woman was most likely to be involved in the selecting and decision-making process. Male editors of translated chick lit such as Florent Massot (Florent Massot présente), Tony Cartano (Albin Michel) and Jacques Sadoul (J’ai lu) all

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<sup>6</sup> Whilst bilingual editions do exist, they seem to be reserved for historically important or culturally prestigious texts. Digital television and increased access to DVD now allow viewers to select options. The majority of televisual fiction, however, is still viewed/broadcast dubbed without the possibility of switching to subtitles.

delegated the initial reading of chick lit novels and manuscripts to female subordinates before making a decision (Massot 04/09/2006)(Cartano 23/08/2006)(Fannius 26/04/2006). For instance, Albin Michel and J'ai lu purchased *BJD* once positive feedback had been received from junior female members of staff (Cartano 23/08/2006)(Fannius 26/04/2006). 'Comédie' collections around translated chick lit were created by Fleuve Noir and J'ai lu under the impetus of Béatrice Duval, Marion Mazauvick, and her assistant Carine Fannius (Massot 04/09/2006). Now chief editor of Fleuve Noir, Duval started her career in publishing as an English-speaking *lectrice*, i.e. a reader whose task is to summarise and comment on potentially publishable books (Duval 03/05/2006). From this subordinate position, Duval progressed to her current role which she informally calls 'cheftaine de lectrices' (Ibid.), highlighting not only her career trajectory but also the gender of those who perform a 'pré-tri' on her behalf (Ibid.). It was through this *pré-tri* that *TDWP* and *MLOP* were selected for translation and publication. In this context, one could advance that in the same way as the feminisation of the Anglo-American media furthered the writing of chick texts in the US and the UK (see Chapter 1, section 2.3.), the growing number of women in the French publishing industry (see Chapter 2, section 2.1.2.) seems to have facilitated chick lit novels' entry into the French literary system. A similar argument could be made about the introduction of chick television series in the French audiovisual system.

The dubbed versions of *AMB* and *SATC* were commissioned to be aired on Téva and M6. The cable channel Téva defines itself as the 'unique chaîne généraliste féminine' ([www.teva.fr](http://www.teva.fr)) and this female-orientation is reflected in its upper layers of management. By the time of chick television series' importation, four of the five top positions in the channel's *organigramme*, including that of managing director, were held by women (Bahou 1999: 249). Until 2006, Téva was also partially owned by the Groupe Marie-Claire whose profile exemplifies the feminisation of the French media: it not only publishes a significant number of women's magazines (amongst which *Cosmopolitan*) but was also primarily owned and managed by women at the time of chick series' importation (de Rochemonde 2000: 8). A similar picture emerges with M6. Compared to other companies in the television industry, the broadcasting channel, which now owns 100% of Téva's shares, also presents a

relatively high number of women at the level of managing and decision-making: out of the fourteen highest executive positions of its *organigramme*, five are occupied by women, amongst whom a ‘directrice adjointe des programmes en charge de la programmation’ (M6 2001a: 6)<sup>7</sup>. M6 also slightly departs from the television and radio industry as a whole which tends to employ 3% more men than women (Cléron and Patureau 2007: 2). In contrast, the channel employs 4% more women than men (M6 2001b: 18). As explained in Chapter 2 (section 3.1.2.), France’s television audience is predominantly female. In the case of M6’s audience, this female-to-male ratio is greater and in 2000, women accounted for 57.6% of the channel’s viewers (CSA 2000: 25). This relatively women-dominated and oriented environment appears favourable to the importation of texts such as chick television series. In 2000, M6 first broadcast *SATC* as part of a newly created weekly thematic night called ‘les filles du mercredi’ (CSA 2000: 25). Wednesday evenings had already been used as a regular prime-time slot by the channel for the broadcasting of *AMB* (Duriez 2005: 71) and in October 2000, the thematic night was launched in order to broadcast two episodes of *AMB* followed *en deuxième partie de soirée* by one episode of *SATC* (CSA 2000: 25). In its annual report on the channel, the CSA remarks that the increase of heroine-centred fictions such as *AMB* and *SATC* in 2000 indicates that M6 ‘entend [...] faire de la composante féminine de son public un nouvel atout’ (CSA 2000: 25).

There thus seems to be a correlation between the introduction of women-oriented fictions such as chick texts in the French cultural system and the increasing number of women working in the French media. As the next section will show, there also seems to be a correlation between the young and innovative personalities of some patrons and their decision to commission chick TTs.

### 3.1.2. Young and Innovative

The notion of chick lit as a genre in the French literary system seems to have emerged thanks to three agents: Carine Fannius<sup>8</sup> (J’ai lu), Béatrice Duval (Fleuve

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<sup>7</sup> This figure can be compared to the top of TF1’s *organigramme*: there are only two women out of seventeen equivalent positions.

<sup>8</sup> Fannius became fully responsible for the ‘Comédie’ collection after the departure of her superior Marion Mazauvick in 2000.

Noir) and Florent Massot (Florent Massot présente) who bought the publishing rights of several chick lit titles in order to create specific 'Comédie' series for their respective publishing houses (Duval 03/05/2006)(Fannius 26/04/2006)(Massot 04/09/2006). Both in their thirties, Duval and Fannius present themselves as members of a new generation of editors who aim to publish books which are 'plus modernes, plus rigolos, plus "pepsi"' (Duval 03/05/2006) than those published by their older counterparts (Fannius 26/04/2006). Youth and innovation are particularly important concepts in Massot's publishing style. As 'le plus jeune' publisher in the industry<sup>9</sup>, Massot spent the first fifteen years of his career privileging innovative works which had little chance of getting published elsewhere (04/09/2006). When asked to elaborate on his approach to publishing literature in general and chick lit in particular, Massot first mentions Virginie Despentes whose controversial manuscript *Baise-moi* had been rejected by nine publishers before being accepted by his publishing house in 1993 (Ibid.). He explains that Despentes's initial failure to get published was not due to the poor quality of her writing but to a lack of literary space in which to position her book (Ibid.). Moreover, Massot believes that French publishers also had 'des raisons morales [...] sans doute parce que c'était une femme' (Ibid.). In other words, Despentes's book presented features which were perceived as poetologically and ideologically unacceptable in a woman-penned novel, suggesting that the resistance to and rewriting of women-oriented sexually subversive and explicit texts persisted amongst French publishers in the 1990s. It is thus interesting that Massot chose this particular case to exemplify his style of publishing. Massot's overall concept is about

ouvrir des espaces sur des courants qui ne trouvent pas leurs places. [...] Y a des déverrouillages à faire [...]. Quand je défends un livre, j'ai envie de me dire 'est-ce que les autres le porteraient, pourraient le faire de la même manière?' Et si ce n'est pas le cas, je me sens vraiment à ma place. (Ibid.)

Massot's approach is thus based on the notion of 'unbolting' for a specific type of literary phenomena: those for which there is no space in the current literary system. His concluding comment on the importance of being professionally different from his competitors reinforces the sense that being subversive and innovative is central to

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<sup>9</sup> Massot started working as an editor at the age of seventeen.

his publishing identity. As section 4 will show, Massot's publishing and marketing style was so subversive that his 'unbolting' of a literary space for chick lit was resisted on a number of levels. Nevertheless, the overall young and innovative profile of chick texts' initiators comes into view more clearly when looking at the two channels which have aired and continue to air both *AMB* and *SATC*: Téva and M6.

As seen in Chapter 2 (section 3.1.1.), cable channels' position in the system of French television tends to be peripheral and texts aimed at a clearly delineated audience tend to be excluded from the canonised 'universal' centre of French culture. As a cable channel explicitly targeted at women, Téva thus cumulates two marginalising characteristics. The channel's 'positionnement féminin' (Rose 2002) and its airing of 'séries cultes au féminin comme *Ally Mc Beal* et *Sex in the City* [*sic.*]' (Ibid.) make Téva unique in the French audiovisual industry. Reports suggest that Téva's uniqueness is achieved through providing its viewers with 'une offre forte et innovante' (M6 2000: 51) and keeping 'its finger on the pulse of every aspect of the feminine experience' (M6 2001b: 52). The importance of chick television series within this up-to-date and groundbreaking channel is highlighted in another report which defines *AMB* as 'la série phare de Téva' (M6 1999: 49) and the launch of *SATC* as 'une vraie bombe [...] dans la lignée d'Ally' (Ibid.). Like Florent Massot présente, difference and innovation thus seem central to Téva's practices and the same could be said about M6, the only French terrestrial channel which subsequently broadcast *AMB* and *SATC*.

Although more mainstream than Téva, the terrestrial private channel M6 still differs from its broadcasting competitors in many ways. Created in 1987, M6 appeared unlikely to succeed: its transmission was limited and it struggled to secure lucrative advertising deals (Kuhn 1995: 201). Yet, slowly and steadily, M6's audience share grew and the channel now ranks second in terms of advertising investments and viewers under the age of fifty (M6 2000: 11-13). M6 defines itself as a 'chaîne différente' (2000: 26) and describes its programming as 'unusual, innovative and progressive' (M6 2001b: 3): music accounts for 60% of its airing time (M6 1999: 26-27) and imported Anglo-American fictions dominate the channel's grid at atypical times (Kuhn 1995: 201), a practice known as 'contre-programmation' (M6 1999: 17).

M6 sees itself as a channel 'par des jeunes pour un public jeune' (2000: 23) and advertises the average age of its staff: thirty-two (Ibid). Importantly, unlike its older counterparts, M6 is not marked by the tradition of public service television (Kuhn 1995: 201).

Youth, difference and innovation appear to be essential characteristics to both the editors of translated chick lit and the channels which commissioned the dubbing of chick television series. In this context, chick texts' entry into the French cultural system could be said to have occurred primarily at the subversive margins of the publishing and audiovisual industries. However, despite most chick texts' peripheral point of entry into the French cultural system, their patrons' tendency to go against what is generally expected and prescribed in their respective industry cannot solely account for their decision to commission chick TTs. In fact, as their success indicates, the youth and innovative qualities of M6, Téva, Fleuve Noir 'Comédie' and J'ai lu 'Comédie' constitute marketable – and thus profitable – features. Channels and publishing houses, no matter how subversive, remain commercially minded institutions. As the following section will develop, the initiators operating within these institutions are equally commercially minded.

### **3.1.3. Commercially Minded**

As noted in Chapter 2 (sections 2.1.1. and 3.2.1.), the presence of Anglo-American fiction on French television and in French publishers' catalogues reflects a production and trade imbalance between French and Anglo-American audiovisual and publishing companies. Although the importation of chick texts in the French cultural system could appear to reflect and reinforce 'the international expansion of Anglo-American culture' (Venuti 1997: 15), the specific circumstances of chick texts' importation suggests a more nuanced picture, one in which agents demonstrate a resistance against the aforementioned expansion or a willingness to capitalise from it. Both tendencies are governed by a desire to make profit. As Venuti observes,

publishers who purchase translation rights are more likely to focus on foreign works that are easily assimilable to domestic cultural values, to prevailing trends and tastes, targeting specific markets so as to avoid the potential loss involved in creating new ones. (1998: 48)

Anglo-American exporting efforts are, of course, not negligible. In most cases, Anglo-American literary agents or publishers initially approached French editors directly, usually by sending their latest titles (Massot 04/09/2006)(Duval 03/05/2006) or in the case of *BJD*, an extract of the manuscript before the novel was complete and published in the UK (Cartano 23/08/2006). However, careful consideration is given regarding each book's selling potential. Fleuve Noir, for instance, receives on average thirty new titles a week from Anglo-American publishers and, as mentioned, operates according to a system of pre-selection which enables its editor-in-chief to concentrate 'sur le meilleur de ce qu'elles [readers] ont retenu' (Duval 03/05/2006). Not all Anglo-American manuscripts, even bestsellers, are selected for translation and publication. Cartano, for instance, recalls having hesitated for a long time over the purchase of *BJD* on the grounds that he was not sure whether 'le public français et notamment les lectrices françaises [allaient] marcher, s'identifier à ce personnage [...], je trouvais ça quand même très "British" dans l'essence, dans la nature' (23/08/2006). It seems that this concern over the extreme otherness of chick lit was shared by a number of Cartano's competitors. The literary agent from whom Massot first purchased six chick lit titles informed him that he was one of the very first French publishers to express interest in the genre (Massot 04/09/2006). Until then, Anglo-American publishers and literary agents' attempts to place their chick lit novels in France had failed primarily because the humour and socio-cultural references were deemed to be too unappealing and commercially unviable (Ibid.).

French publishers' first reaction to chick lit thus seems to indicate that for a long time, acquiring the rights of such novels and commissioning a translation were not considered to be worthwhile investments. Indeed, both Massot's and Duval's experiences seem to confirm that creating a new market for chick TTs was a financially risky enterprise. A translation costs around 10,000 Euros (Duval 03/05/2006), an expenditure a French-language novel would not require (Massot 04/09/2006)(Duval 03/05/2006). The costs and the financial loss a translation might incur appear to have been strong deterrents for the publishers who had doubts about the appeal of chick lit novels to the French market.

To a certain extent, publishers' doubts as regards the commercial viability of chick lit appears to have been founded: with the exception of *BJD*, the genre initially struggled to find its place on the French book market and the sales figures of some titles (including *MM* and *MLOP*) have been particularly low (Duval 03/05/2006)(Fannius 26/04/2006). However, for the young and innovative French editors and publishers who believed in chick lit's selling potential, traditional publishers' initial reluctance to purchase the translation rights of chick lit novels represented a golden opportunity: it forced literary agents to lower their prices, a practice which enabled Duval to acquire *TDWP* 'pour une bouchée de pain. Personne n'en voulait à Paris, au motif que c'était trop américain' (in Peras 2006a: 45). The relative absence of competitors also enabled Florent Massot présente and J'ai lu to arrange a business partnership in 2000 in order to pre-empt Anglo-American exporting attempts and give the two publishing houses a *longueur d'avance* (Massot 04/09/2006). Mutually strengthened by the other's financial contribution and publishing prospects, Massot and Fannius travelled to London to approach literary agents directly in order to acquire together the translation rights of many chick lit novels, amongst which Jane Green's novels (Fannius 26/04/2006)(Massot 04/09/2006). Making 'generous' offers to literary agents without shouldering the entire cost financially helped independent publishing house Florent Massot présente and enabled both publishers to keep potential competitors at bay (Massot 04/09/2006). Indeed, as the French translation of *BJD* continued to be commercially successful, bolstered by the release of its cinematic adaptation in 2001, some publishing houses 'commençaient à se poser la question' (Massot 04/09/2006) as to whether acquiring the translation rights of similar novels would be a profitable enterprise (Ibid.). As the following section will demonstrate, chick texts indeed presented a number of specific elements deemed to be sufficiently attractive to the French market.

### 3.2. Text Type and Genre

This section explores in further detail the text type and genre of chick texts as perceived by the French initiators and producers of chick TTs. As demonstrated in Chapter 1 (sections 3.1. and 3.2.), chick STs aim to induce an emotional response (laughter, identification or sympathy) from their recipients and their *skopos* could be



identified as operative. It seems that in most cases, chick STs have also been perceived as operative by the patrons of chick TTs. The various French editors of chick lit interviewed for this research invariably stressed the appellative nature of STs and the behavioural and emotional responses the originals induced in either themselves or whoever first read them: pleasure and laughter (Cartano 23/08/2006)(Fannius 26/04/2006)(Massot 04/09/2006). Laughter was most important for Massot whose initial aim for translated chick lit texts had been to reconcile the French readership with satirical comedies (Massot 04/09/2006). However, as already mentioned, a number of titles published by Florent Massot présente were jointly bought with J'ai lu and, as section 3.3. will develop, J'ai lu's intended purpose for chick TTs has been partially different. Nevertheless, one could conclude that in commissioning chick TTs, editors would expect them to be equally amusing and that as far as humour is concerned, there is a functional constancy between most chick STs and chick TTs.

Responses also suggest that agents involved in the production of chick texts perceived identification to be an important element of chick STs. Duval, for instance, believes that 'c'est très bien [...] que les femmes puissent à travers leur lecture, s'identifier vraiment aux héroïnes et vivre à travers les livres, ce qu'elles vivent vraiment dans la vie courante' (03/05/2006). As previously mentioned, one of Cartano's initial concerns about the potential appeal of *BJD* was the heroine's ability to elicit identification from French female readers. Cartano decided to negotiate the novel's translation rights once he was reassured that 'toutes les femmes pouvaient s'identifier à Bridget Jones d'une façon ou d'une autre' (in Peras 2006a: 45). Interestingly, the female colleagues Cartano had selected to read the manuscript of *BJD* all corresponded to a specific profile: like the heroine, they were in their thirties, single and they had, he presumed, similar romantic dilemmas (23/08/2006). There is another characteristic which Cartano does not touch upon but is still worth mentioning: like Bridget Jones, these women were employed in a publishing company. Although Pascale Gatineau (one of the dubbing authors of *AMB* and *SATC* and a married woman in her forties) does not correspond to the profile of chick television series' heroines, she also defines identification as an important element of chick series:

beaucoup de femmes du monde entier ont pu s'identifier au moins à l'une des héroïnes. Quand vous prenez *AMB* et *SATC*, vous prenez toutes les héroïnes, y en a au moins une qui vous ressemble. Parce qu'on l'a fait dans ce sens-là, parce que ça a été pondu à l'origine dans ce sens-là, je veux dire, en anglais et en français, on l'a écrit dans ce sens-là, vous remarquerez qu'on ne les fait pas parler pareil. (05/04/2007)

Gatineau here suggests that the realistic and identifiable nature of the women portrayed in both *AMB* and *SATC* has influenced her translational strategies. In order to maintain the functional constancy between chick STs and chick TTs, both texts were written in a way which would enable viewers to identify with the main characters. In other words, in order to operate in the same way and have the same effect as chick STs, the tone and style of chick TTs had to be different.

Massot aside, there also seems a strong consensus amongst French initiators that chick texts are essentially romantic. To Cartano, for instance, chick lit has partially replaced 'le roman sentimental à l'ancienne' (in Peras 2006a: 45). Duval and Fannius define chick lit as a modern type of 'roman sentimental' (Fannius 26/04/2006) and 'roman féminin classique' (Duval 03/05/2006) in which 'le traitement [of romance] est différent' (Ibid.) but 'l'archétype de base' (Duval 03/05/2006) and the plot mechanisms are the same (Fannius 26/04/2006). Pascale and Giles Gatineau's responses as regards *AMB* and *SATC* are equally enlightening. They see the series *AMB* as 'romantique, mignonne, fleur bleue' (05/04/2007) with heroines who 'cherchent le grand amour' and fairy tale overtones 'se marièrent et eurent beaucoup d'enfants' (Ibid.). *SATC*, however, seems to have provoked a relative disagreement between Pascale and Giles Gatineau. To Pascale Gatineau, *SATC* differs because the heroines 'ne cherchent pas forcément le grand amour' (05/04/2007). In contrast and in a way which singularly echoes Fannius and Duval's notion of a different treatment of romance in chick lit, Giles Gatineau finds that in *AMB* and *SATC*: 'la quête est la même, c'est la façon de traiter qui est différente' (Ibid.). The two dubbing authors agree on at least one difference: *AMB*'s location in Boston gives the series a 'provincial' feel which is relatively absent from *SATC* whose heroines are 'quatre vraies New-Yorkaises, pures et dures... avec des faiblesses bien sûr' (Ibid.). One could thus conclude from these responses that chick STs are regarded as primarily romantic texts by a number of agents involved in the production of chick TTs. This suggests that, at the initial stage of the communicative process, the main protagonists

of chick texts are interpreted as archetypical romantic heroines. As Chapters 4 and 5 will show, such an interpretation certainly sheds light on chick TTs' rewriting of femininity in the public and private spheres.

Amongst the titles under study here, the book *SATC* seems to be the only text whose type and genre do not exactly conform to the appellative entertaining romance profile outlined above. Indeed, the absence of a clear romantic plot and the chronicle format of *SATC* seem to have shaped the French editor's perception of the novel as a non-best-selling and informative chronicle. Cartano defines the book as 'des chroniques, des portraits, c'est presque, comment dirais-je, un reportage' (23/08/2006). Cartano also mentions other reasons as to why he sees *SATC* as different from other chick texts and notably its British counterpart *BJD*:

le livre *SATC* n'a pas connu le succès de best-seller que Bridget Jones a connu en Angleterre. Si vous voulez, *SATC* a davantage fonctionné comme un *long-seller*. [...] De manière régulière, sans accélération brutale. Et même la série télévisée n'a pas produit cette accélération [...]. On continue, bien sûr, à bien le vendre, parce que petit à petit, la série télévisée est restée marquée chez les gens [mimicking these people:] 'Tiens, ben alors, qu'est que c'est que ce bouquin, on va aller voir'. (Cartano 23/08/2006)

Significantly, Cartano perceives *SATC*'s potential readership as generic *gens* and not as necessarily female, unlike the 'lectrices françaises' of *BJD* (Ibid.). Moreover, Cartano does not perceive *SATC* to be a best-seller in Britain despite the fact that the British edition of the novel was reprinted twenty-two times in six years. Cartano's words also suggest that the French translation of *SATC* is likely to attract a consuming public already acquainted with the series. Whilst Anglo-American publishers of *SATC* may have also capitalised on the success of the televisual adaptation, it should be noted that, as the novel *SATC* itself was produced prior to the series, its original *skopos* could not be to reach the series's viewers. Cartano's perception of the text type and genre of the novel *SATC* suggests that its French translation is likely to present a marked case of *Funktionsänderung*: from a bestselling and entertaining text aimed at women to a non-bestselling and informative text aimed at a non-gender specific public interested in a society and culture markedly different from its own. As section 4.2.3. will demonstrate, this *Funktionsänderung* has had an evident impact on the packaging strategies of both

Albin Michel and Le Livre de poche. As Chapter 4 will also show, this *Funktionsänderung* has also influenced some of the translational strategies employed in the TT, notably in the rendering of women's professional achievement.

Since the view according to which chick texts are primarily romances is one amongst many in Anglo-American cultures, it could also be argued that other chick TTs are likely to present, albeit to a lesser extent, a change of function. Indeed, if one started from the principle that the romantic relationship is not given much narrative and emotional weight in chick texts (Mabry 2006: 200), patrons' over-emphasis on the romantic element could potentially result in a partial case of *Funktionsänderung*. As Chapters 4 and 5 will detail, this *Funktionsänderung* has informed a number of translational approaches adopted in chick TTs. Before elaborating on how the perceived text type and genre of chick texts influenced translational actions as such, I shall explore the aims advanced by the initiators of chick TTs.

### 3.3. Aims

Interviews with patrons of chick TTs reveal two categories of aims: external aims pertaining to the wider French cultural context and internal aims pertaining to the individual's or the publishing company's own needs. Most respondents express both types. Massot, for instance, wanted translated chick lit to 'unbolt' a French cultural *blocage* on laughter and to reconcile French readers with comedy as a worthy genre (04/09/2006). Massot also had personal and professional motives. Having published *romans noirs* throughout the 1990s, he felt a personal *saturation* with the bleakness of the genre and needed to indulge in his 'envie de rigoler [...] envie de la vie' (Massot 04/09/2006). As the *roman noir* was becoming more mainstream, Massot lost most of his major authors to 'bigger' publishers (Ibid.). Chick TTs thus fulfilled both his desire for more light-hearted novels and his professional need for a new source of revenue. The same could be said about Duval and the new editorial direction Fleuve Noir took upon her arrival in the publishing house: Fleuve Noir depended on Frédéric Dard's detective novels and notably his latest titles. When Dard died, Duval explains that

il fallait trouver d'autres sources [...] d'approvisionnement et d'autres sources éditoriales. Moi, le positionnement Fleuve Noir, c'est-à-dire les romans policiers, populaires, plutôt masculins, ça me branchait pas tellement et puis j'y

connaissais rien. Et donc je me suis dit qu'après tout ce que j'avais envie de faire et là où je pensais qu'il y avait un potentiel c'était des livres pour filles. (Duval 03/05/2006)

Fleuve Noir's initial appropriation of chick lit's editorial space was therefore a matter of survival for the publishing house. In the same way as translated chick lit novels came to replace *romans noirs* in Florent Massot's catalogue of recently published titles, translated chick lit came to substitute Fleuve Noir's main source of revenue. Like Massot's, Duval's decision to radically change Fleuve Noir's editorial trajectory seems to stem from a personal *envie* as much as commercial resourcefulness. Reaching women, the opposite sex of Fleuve Noir's usual target readership, as a potential group of consumers also seems to have been part of a wider cultural aim:

je pense que c'est très bien de dépoussiérer un peu le genre [the romantic novel], c'est un peu ce que *Sex and the City* a fait pour les séries télé par rapport à *Dallas* [...]. Mais les romans féminins existeront toujours. Les femmes auront toujours envie de lire des héroïnes féminines auxquelles elles s'identifient et qui leur permettent de passer un bon moment. (Duval 03/05/2006)

Here, Duval links her overall aim to her understanding of the wider cultural system: a specific consuming public 'needs' women-oriented forms of entertainment but might regard the previously available ones as outdated. In the light of Duval's response, one could suggest that the initiation of chick lit appears to be motivated by the need for a change in the target system. As Lefevere remarks, innovations are typically introduced into a system when patronage perceive change to be essential for the system to remain functional (1992: 23). Duval's external and internal motivations point to a relatively clear *skopos* for the chick TTs published by Fleuve Noir: to generate revenue by providing a young and modern female readership with modernised versions of romantic novels.

J'ai lu's motivations for chick TTs echo those of Fleuve Noir in many ways. As previously mentioned, Fannius, like Duval, perceives chick texts to be archetypical romances. One of J'ai lu's main sources of revenue is its 'pôle sentimental' (26/04/2006): 'J'ai lu pour elle', whose first published author was Barbara Cartland (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.6.). Interestingly, 2000, the year of Cartland's death, coincided with that of the creation of the series 'Comédie'. At the time of Fannius's

interview, translated chick lit published under the series 'Comédie' did not feature in the 'J'ai lu pour elle' catalogue but in the 'Littérature générale' catalogue. However, an imminent restructuration was going to reshuffle titles and reintegrate them in either category (Fannius 26/04/2006), suggesting that the line between translated chick lit titles and contemporary romantic literature can be easily crossed in either direction. Massot's response as regards his business partnership with J'ai lu reveals that this ambiguity has been deliberate. From the beginning, J'ai lu was 'dans une idée, un peu plus populaire comme on dit, un peu plus bas de gamme, mais disons que eux voulaient faire remonter le côté Harlequin vers la littérature' (Massot 04/09/2006). The editorial team of J'ai lu was therefore looking for an intermediary popular literature between romance and mainstream literature. The translations of all co-bought chick texts were commissioned and copyrighted by Florent Massot présente but J'ai lu's financial involvement makes their commercial imperatives (closely linked to their 'more popular Harlequin idea') as likely to impact on translational strategies as Florent Massot's own imperatives and intentions. It could therefore be said that J'ai lu's aim for chick lit novels was to provide readers with modern romances in order to emulate the success of 'J'ai lu pour elle' and its competitor, Harlequin. Like Fleuve Noir, J'ai lu seems to see chick lit as the most appropriate continuation of mass-market romances. This is confirmed by Fannius's response as regards the target readership of the series 'Comédie'. Like other editors (Massot 04/09/2006)(Duval 03/05/2006) and Anglo-American publishers (see Chapter 1, section 4.2.1.2.), Fannius points to a category of young urban women who read a lot of *presse féminine* (26/04/2006). However, the French readership's age bracket seems to be wider at the younger end: 'les héroïnes de ces livres-là ont en général, une trentaine d'année, mais notre public, il est beaucoup plus jeune, il va de quinze à trente-cinq ans et de quinze à vingt-cinq ans, on a déjà une grosse partie' (Ibid.). This slight difference between the French readership's age and that of the heroines is significant and can be compared to Anglo-American cultures where the constancy between readers' age-group and that of the central characters and authors in chick lit has led to subgenres such as 'teen lit' and 'mom lit'. Moreover, in France, as explained in Chapter 2 (sections 2.2.1., 2.2.2. and 2.2.6), the provision of models of feminine and heterosexual behaviour to female teenagers is perceived to be an

important poetological element in the romantic genre. It seems that chick lit has been perceived to fulfil a similar educational function. In an article devoted to the ‘new’ chick lit phenomenon in April 2006, *ELLE* defines target readers as ‘adolescentes à la recherche de modèles et trentenaires en quête d’identification’ (Frey and Goldszal 2006: 183). This emphasis on the potentially younger age of translated chick lit’s target recipients is important for, if taken into account, this could constitute another partial *Funktionsänderung* between STs and TTs. As Venuti observes, ‘the publisher’s approach to the foreign text is primarily commercial [...] an exploitation governed by an estimate of the market at home’ (1998: 124). The estimate made by patrons of translated chick lit novels seems to be that the new generation of young women ‘need’ modernised feminine romantic novels.

Interestingly, most initiators seem to start from the premise that this need cannot be fulfilled by domestically produced fiction. Both Fannius and Duval find that initial French attempts at chick lit were of much lesser quality (Fannius 26/04/2006)(Duval 03/05/2006). To them, French authors lacked the authenticity, audacity and humour of their Anglo-American counterparts (Ibid.). This situation was especially problematic for Massot who had initially seen Anglo-American chick lit novels as a temporary measure which would enable him to open a literary space and launch French equivalent authors to Helen Fielding (04/09/2006). However, he struggled to find enough authors and to secure enough interest from his investors to follow this editorial route (Ibid.). French journalistic reviews of chick lit, notably those of *Lire* magazine, reveal a persisting concern over the ‘quality’ of French contributions to the genre. A *dossier* of reviews entitled ‘La sélection “chick lit” de *Lire*’ establishes a hierarchy between ‘Le meilleur’, ‘Pourquoi pas?’ and ‘Le pire’ (Peras 2006b: 46-48). Tellingly, only one out of the four ‘best’ authors is French whilst two of the three ‘worst’ novels are by French authors. One of the reviews in this ‘worst’ category encapsulates this ambivalence towards domestically produced chick lit: ‘étrange comme sur le terrain de la *chick lit* les Françaises ont du mal à rivaliser avec les Anglo-Saxonnes, autrement habiles pour rire et faire rire de leurs travers, en racontant de bonnes histoires’ (Peras 2006b: 48). From this angle, it could be argued that the aim of chick TTs in France is to generate revenue by providing young female readers with entertaining romances which cannot be written by local writers. For

initiators to achieve this aim, chick TTs need to operate in specific ways. The following section looks at the range of aim-oriented translational and marketing actions which have been deemed necessary for chick TTs to fulfil their intended functions.

## **4. Actions**

### **4.1. Translational Actions**

This section first explores two interrelated types of aim-oriented actions: the selection of a translator, and the impersonating criterion. It then examines the overriding and hazy principle of pleasurable fluidity before turning to a significant consequence of this principle: censorship.

#### **4.1.1. Selection and Impersonation**

According to Médiadub, dubbing authors are selected according to three criteria: speed, availability and personal affinities with the dubbing director (Vaquero 28/08/2006). This last criterion seems to be particularly important for each dubbing director has a specific approach which, if unshared by the dubbing authors, can cause time-consuming conflicts: a good dubbed version is produced quickly and unproblematically (Sarhou 2006: 224). In Bellone's words: 'notre participation à un ouvrage évolutif nous rend chacun tributaire de la compétence de celui qui précède – au même titre que de notre propre soin se trouvera facilitée la tâche de nos suivants' (Bellone in Justamand 2006a: 71). As many are involved in this *ouvrage évolutif*, a successful dubbed version is one for which there is the greatest level of personal harmony amongst agents.

Cartano, the French editor of *BJD* and *SATC*, selects translators according to similar principles: availability, reputation, and 'la personnalité qu'il a d'adapter ça en fonction du livre qu'il y a à traduire' (Cartano 23/08/2006). This idea of personality is echoed in Duval's interview. Here, she refers to her initial difficulties in finding appropriate translators for chick lit novels:



ça n'a pas été évident au début [...]. En fait elles l'avaient ou elle l'avaient pas. Bon il se trouve que la traductrice à laquelle je pense [Christine Barbaste], c'est une fille qui est elle-même cinglée de mode. Qui est très Parisienne. Qui est dans tous les endroits branchés et qui [...] est complètement en conformité avec ce qu'elle décrit. [...] Elle incarne complètement ses héroïnes, donc elle adore faire ça et elle est parfaitement en phase avec. (03/05/2006)

Duval's description of Christine Barbaste – who translated *TDWP* – points to the importance of having translators who, like the main female protagonists, live in a capital city and appreciate fashionable clothes and establishments. 'En phase', 'en conformité' and 'incarne' indicate that the translator not only needs to identify with the heroine, she also needs to impersonate her.

In the same way as the most operative translators not only identify with but also impersonate a novel's main character, a good dubbing writer possesses the ability to get inside a character's head and skin to understand his or her emotions. In Pascale and Giles Gattineau's words:

On est obligé d'être un peu schizophrène pour faire ce travail, vous ne pouvez pas faire parler quelqu'un si vous ne rentrez pas dans sa tête. [...] si on veut faire parler correctement un personnage, il faut se mettre dans sa peau un petit peu, pour comprendre ses émotions, [...] pour trouver les mots qu'on dirait à sa place. (Gattineau 05/04/2007)

The notion of impersonation is thus equally important to dubbing authors. Without a split-personality process, it seems that it would be impossible to make a character speak 'correctly'. As Venuti notes, translation is perceived by its practitioners as a type of psychological playacting in which translators contend that they repress their own personality (1997: 7). As the following section will demonstrate, the ability to put oneself in the character's shoes and to create a 'correct' equivalent persona in French is closely related to an important aspect of translational actions in the French publishing and dubbing industries: the production of pleurably fluid texts.

#### **4.1.2. Pleasurable Fluidity**

Massot is the only editor whose selection of translators for chick lit novels slightly differs from that of his competitors. In line with his innovative approach, Massot decided to give new translators a chance by testing them on the translation of the same passage:

de là, les choses se sont éliminées d'elles-mêmes [...]. De toute façon, c'est complétement ressenti, c'est pas... c'est musical. Y a pas de théorie particulière. Ouais, moi je ne suis pas dans la théorie mais dans le ressenti donc, je lisais les trucs et je disais 'ça c'est fluide, ça, ça sonne bien, là ça me fait rire, donc ça marche. Point.' À partir du moment où ça marchait... (Massot 04/09/2006)

What Massot sees as purely intuitive and not theoretical is in fact central to the *skopos* theory: an operative text needs to 'sound right' and 'work'. The use of the adjective *fluide* shows that Massot is informed by a relatively conservative principle adopted by the majority of publishers of translated novels for whom 'la fluidité de la lecture rest[e] un critère predominant [and] une condition indispensable au plaisir' (Sarhou 2006: 222). As Sarhou observes, the association of pleasure and fluidity raises a number of questions:

Pourquoi le lecteur français est-il censé avoir plus besoin de fluidité que le lecteur anglophone? Pourquoi faut-il lui alléger, lui raccourcir, certains passages pour les lui rendre plus digestes? Cela revient à coup sûr à le priver de la démarche de découvrir une culture différente de la sienne. (Ibid.)

Sarhou's questions show the extent to which the principle of pleasurable fluidity overrides the potentially informative content of a translation. In this context, rearranging the ST's content in order to make it sound as French as possible is likely to be more central to the TT's *skopos* than informing readers about the otherness of a foreign culture. In Massot's words, an operative TT must 'transposer un petit peu [...] trouver un ton, et un ton quand même à la française' (04/09/2006).

Massot's view of a successful chick TT as creating a French-sounding equivalent tone to the ST echoes that of Pascale and Giles Gattineau's in several ways. As previously mentioned, the ability to write as one speaks is considered important to a dubbing author's work within the industry. In the same way as Massot's definition of a successful translation is based on a hazy combination of feeling and music rather than theory, intuitiveness and music seem key to the assessment of a dubbing author's work. According to Pascale Gattineau, an operative dubbing author is a person who is 'naturally' good with spoken language, like 'une bonne chanteuse qui a une belle voix' (05/04/2006). As already mentioned, in order to achieve an equivalent effect of identification, Pascale and Giles Gattineau have altered the way in which the heroines of chick texts express themselves. In the same way as a

successful translation expresses an equivalent tone for Massot, a successful dubbed version is one which ‘creates’ an equivalent style for each role:

Parce que le style que vous avez en français, c’est nous qui l’avons créé, elles [the heroines] ne l’avaient pas forcément. [...] On a créé [each heroine’s] rôle à l’observation, on a vu comment elle se comportait, quand vous avez un certain comportement, vous avez un certain vocabulaire. [...] Souvent on croit que notre travail consiste à traduire, c’est vachement plus fin que ça. [...] On aime bien savoir qui va doubler, parce qu’une comédienne ou une autre comédienne ne vont pas jouer pareil. Donc on n’écrit pas pour un rôle, on écrit pour une comédienne. En sachant qu’elle va être beaucoup plus à l’aise avec tels mots. (Gatineau 05/04/2006)

Dubbed versions of dialogues are written with the dubbing actors in mind and vocabulary is thus likely to change according to the attitude and personality of whoever will deliver the lines. Psychology and the ability to adapt a role according to the dubbing actor appear more important than the mere translation work that dubbing authors’ writing is often mistaken to be. For the dubbed version to reach ‘le même but’ (Ibid.), dubbing actors have to be completely comfortable with the lines they are given to deliver. A successful adaptation is one which can be performed instantly, which does not require alteration upon recording, which ‘coule’ and provides ‘du plaisir’ to viewers (Gatineau 05/04/2007). The use of the verb *couler* is singularly reminiscent of Massot’s *fluide* and the pleasurable fluidity principle described above. In an operative dubbed version, pleasure is understood to derive from the absence of non-French sounding sentences: ‘[il] faut que quand la personne regarde, elle n’ait que le plaisir de regarder, et qu’elle n’ait pas dans son esprit: “Oh tiens, oh, c’est pas joli cette phrase-là, c’est pas français”’ (05/04/2007). In other words, a successful TT does not draw attention to itself. In the same way as a fluid translation does not distract the reader from the activity of reading, a fluid dubbed version does not distract the viewer from the pleasurable activity of watching the screen. The importance of using fluent and attractive language shows the extent to which dubbed versions are assessed according to the same criterion as a significant number of literary translations: ‘the absence of any linguistic and stylistic peculiarities’ (Venuti 1997: 1). A good TT – be it a literary translation or a dubbed version – is invisible, a ‘text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated’ (Shapiro in Venuti 1997: 1). In order to achieve what Venuti calls ‘the illusory effect of transparency’ (1998:

12), the TT producer will need to avoid any dialect, register, or style which calls attention to words as words (Ibid).

Venuti's notion of invisibility seems particularly applicable to the current dubbing practices of televisual texts in French recording studios where there seems to be a marked indifference towards the semantic content of STs. Before attending a recording session at Médiadub, visitors are instructed to stay quiet and to never point out that 'c'est pas ce qu'il dit en anglais' (Caudron 28/08/2006). Words and phrases from the *auteur's* script can be changed if, once spoken, they do not 'sound right' to the actor, the dubbing director or the sound engineer. As Sarthou observes, this situation ought to be anticipated and avoided by the dubbing author, for those whose scripts need recurrent altering upon recording may, in the long run, alienate their collaborators (especially the dubbing director) and consequently receive fewer commissions (2006: 224). Synchronisation and lip movement are also regularly overlooked technicalities and interviewed dubbing authors stress that a beautifully fluent sentence is preferable to a carefully matched labial (Denis 28/08/2006)(Gatineau 05/04/2007). It is believed that such a sentence 'passera beaucoup mieux' (Gatineau 05/04/2007).

For the agents involved in the production of chick TTs, an operative TT is thus one which does not call attention to its nature as a translation and communicates an 'adaptive' equivalent effect *à la française*. In functionalist terms, this means that the translational action aims to make the TT a 'part of a world continuum which can be interpreted by the recipients as coherent with their situation' (Schäffner 2001: 236). As the next section will develop, one way to ensure such coherence is by removing elements which are perceived to be potentially problematic.

#### **4.1.3. Censorship**

This section explores aspects of STs in general and chick STs in particular which have been considered by editors and dubbing authors to potentially impede on the pleasurable fluidity of TTs. As Chapter 2 showed (sections 2.1. and 3.1.), universalism and elitism influence many aspects of the French literary and audiovisual systems. In the televisual field, for instance, France is believed to be a nation devoid of commercially viable minority publics and the low cultural status of

television means that viewers tend to be perceived as uneducated and lower-class. The principle of pleasurable fluidity outlined in the previous section is reminiscent of the essential ingredients in nineteenth century mass-market *feuilletons*: easily interpretable language and recognisable stereotypes (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.1.). As Chapter 2 also demonstrated, the perceived absence of minority publics and the notion of *formatage* limit thematic and ideological transgressions in domestically produced television fiction. As Sarthou notes, transgressions are even more discouraged in dubbed television fiction:

dans le monde de la traduction plus encore que celui de la création originale, l'idée de 'vaste public' débouche de plus en plus sur celle de 'banalisation' [...] qui vise un affadissement en luttant contre toute spécificité, afin que le 'produit culturel' soit aisément consommable par le plus grand nombre. (2006: 216)

To Sarthou, commercially necessary fluidity and the disappearance of specificity lead to a poorer TT. This is not the case for all dubbing authors. Pascale and Giles Gatteau, for instance, talk of the need to produce a smoother TT and of being 'obligés d'aplanir [...] de passer la pierre ponce pour que ça soit bien lisse' (05/04/2007). To achieve smoothness, defects considered to make the surface of the text uneven are concealed, flattened or circumvented: 'un défaut américain, par exemple, on ne va surtout pas le faire ressortir, on va le cacher [...] le détourner' (Ibid.). Amongst protruding flaws are Anglo-American *esprit communautaire*, nationalism, political correctness, jokes and references to brands and daily life items (Ibid.). While Sarthou finds that this tendency breeds ethnocentricity and prevents viewers from opening their minds to foreign cultures (2006), Pascale and Giles Gatteau believe the opposite: smoothing down is essential so that an idea 'passe dans l'esprit d'un Français' (05/04/2007) and a 'smooth' dubbed version provides viewers with a more attractive image of the source culture which 'donne envie aux gens d'aller voir ailleurs ce qu'il y a, en se disant, en arrêtant de se dire: "c'est vachement mieux chez moi"' (Ibid.). In other words, in concealing perceived Anglo-American flaws, successful dubbed versions 'bring back a cultural other as the same' (Venuti 1997: 18), providing viewers 'with the narcissistic experience of recognising their own culture in a cultural other' (Venuti 1997: 15). Interestingly, the strategy of smoothing down is not employed solely when terms are deemed to lack a semantic equivalent. In Giles Gatteau's words: 'ce vocabulaire-là, nous on le comprend, on

peut le traduire, mais on ne peut pas le mettre, parce que ça va être réservé à une élite' (Ibid.). Universalism and elitism thus seem to function as a filter which separates out what can and cannot reach the wider viewing public on the basis of what the majority of this public is believed to understand.

If one starts from the premises that French television is 'the most conservative and unforward looking instrument of mass communication' (Hayward 1990: 104) and that dubbing is an ideological instrument 'used to protect the homogeneity of the local system of social values' (Goris 1993: 172), the practice of polishing the flaws of audiovisual STs as described by Pascale and Giles Gatineau could be defined as self-censorship. As Bourdieu observes about the media industry, job security and political conformity are not unrelated and 'consciously or unconsciously, people censor themselves – they don't need to be called into line' (Bourdieu 1998: 15). The dubbing industry within the media industry is no exception: the most successful dubbing authors are those who, like Pascale and Giles Gatineau<sup>10</sup>, know 'les limites à ne pas dépasser' (05/04/2007) and can anticipate problems and criticisms from the dubbing director, the actors and the broadcasting channel (Sarhou 2006: 220-225). As Sarhou observes, refusing to alter a TT can be both pointless and professionally dangerous for dubbing authors: the TT is likely to be changed without their consent and they risk being ostracised (Ibid.).

A similar argument could be made about the translators of bestselling and mass-market literature. Duval, for instance, mentions the case of *The Right Address*, a chick lit novel whose translation rights she initially acquired because the ST had been successful in the US. However, she had reservations about the book's selling potential and notably the heroine's appeal to French readers: 'on ne s'identifie pas à elle [...] et on a un peu envie de la biffer' (03/05/2006). The TT, published under the name of *Chic et choc à New York*, was translated by Christine Barbaste and became popular not only amongst Duval's colleagues (03/05/2006) but also amongst literary journalists (Peras 2006b: 46). When Duval expressed her surprise at this unexpected

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<sup>10</sup> Pascale and Giles Gatineau have forty-two years of experience in the dubbing industry between them and have worked as dubbing authors on a number of what could be called central texts (in Even-Zohar's terms) in the system of French television: *Le Cosby Show*, *Perry Mason*, *Ben Hill*, and *Derrick*. Giles Gatineau's father himself was a renowned dubbing author and actor in the industry who notably worked on equally popular television series such as *La petite maison dans la prairie*.

success, Barbaste revealed that she had shared a similar scepticism regarding the main character and that upon translating, she had modified her and given her ‘un caractère un peu plus pêchu, un peu plus rigolote’ (03/05/2006). To Duval, an appealing heroine is central to the overall appeal of a chick lit novel and her anecdote shows the extent to which unappealing personality traits can be transformed. Clearly, these modifications increased the novel’s perceived appeal and quality and it is perhaps not incidental that Duval refers to Barbaste as an exceptional translator who ‘traduit tous les meilleurs’ (03/05/2006).

Censorship can also occur when a translation is still in progress and may be initiated by either the translator or the editor. Cartano defines his relationship to the translators he commissions as a collaboration and exchange of ideas ‘pour arriver à un texte définitif [and] la meilleure solution possible’ (23/08/2006). In the case of *BJD*, Cartano recalls many ‘difficultés [...] de tonalité, de mots, de néologismes à créer, à inventer’ (Ibid.). Reworking translated texts is necessary and a practice which Cartano defines as ‘visse[r] les boulons’ (Ibid.). Tightening bolts seem to be an editing strategy also employed by Duval. In her interview, Duval talks of a particular case of jokes on anal sex in a chick ST which was in the process of being translated:

dans de la chick lit, là, franchement, y en a pas besoin. [...] Dans ce genre de roman, bon, la fille, elle peut être [...] un peu insolente [...] mais pas les vanes à deux balles là-dessus, ça, on ne fait pas, quoi. Nous, enfin. Dans ce genre, ça n’apporte rien. (03/05/2006)

Duval adds that the translator had alerted her and a meeting had been scheduled the following week to deal with this problematic issue. Chick TTs published by Fleuve Noir are thus rewritten in accordance to what Duval perceives to be acceptable: a chick heroine can be slightly insolent but there seems to be a line which insolence – such as jokes about anal sex – simply cannot cross since it does not bring anything to the genre. As Chapter 2 demonstrated (section 2.2.6.), the poetics of romantic literature had already informed the practices of ‘couper’ and ‘édulcorer’ certain representations of women’s sexuality, especially those considered to be ‘vulgaire’ (Constans 1999: 252)(Houel 1997: 107). Duval’s approach does not seem to be unique amongst French editors of translated chick lit. Massot himself initially claims

not to have resorted to modifying the novels and mentions that, unlike him, many publishers ‘ont essayé de formater [...]’. Ça, c’est les mauvaises influences justement de la comédie romantique Harlequin’ (04/09/2006). Similar in terms to the previously discussed televisual *formatage*, the formatting of chick lit novels consists of making TTs fit into a pre-existing genre: that of Harlequin romances. As Harlequin novels’ plots are essentially driven by the development of a relationship between a heroine and a hero, one could thus advance the hypothesis that in formatting chick lit novels into Harlequin novels, translators and editors are more likely to prioritise elements that conform to such poetics and discard elements that do not.

This process of discarding elements certainly seems to have occurred in the dubbed versions of chick television series, notably *SATC*. In the same way as a chick lit novel appears unfit for publication if it contains references to a certain type of sexual practice, a chick audiovisual text appears unfit for broadcasting if it contains an excessive amount of sexually explicit terms. In their interview, Pascale and Giles Gatineau recall that in writing the dubbed version of *SATC*, they were ‘obligés d’édulcorer la vulgarité [...]’. Sinon, c’était indiffusable’ (05/04/2007). Here, one is strongly reminded of the vulgarity of Harlequin novels which also needed to be *édulcoré*. Yet, despite this weakening of the series’s vulgarity, its broadcasting was considerably delayed because M6 struggled to find a suitable time-slot: programmers ‘[ne] voulaient pas que ça heurte certaines personnes’ (Hébert 28/08/2006). Today, *SATC* is rarely aired before 11 pm on M6 and even on Téva which, as a marginal cable channel targeted at women, could be expected to be less concerned with upsetting its audience. As Duriez observes, the post-11 pm time slot is commonly known as *la deuxième partie de soirée* and tends to be reserved for series which are ‘quasi exclusivement à base de thématiques horribles ou [...] réservées à un public très averti’ (2005: 71). The dubbing authors’ toning down was thus not sufficient to make the series *SATC* acceptable for the majority and the channels furthered the process of censorship by limiting its mainstream appeal and placing *SATC* in a category of ‘produits surciblés [...] moins grand public’ (2001: 79), in other words, in the same class as potentially disturbing horror series.



Interestingly, although Massot claims that compared to other editors, his general approach to chick texts was to not interfere with their semantic content, he does allude to some extensive editing work regarding long passages, background details and subplots:

des longueurs [...] des trucs qui sont complètement... qui sont pas dans le sujet, qui servent pas le sujet, qui servent pas le héros [...]. Les éditeurs anglais, il y a eu une petite période où ça marchait, ça marchait tout seul, ils ont dû moins intervenir sur les textes, la qualité a baissé. (Massot 04/09/2006)

In Massot's explanation, the elements which did not contribute to the topic, the hero or the overall quality of the text needed to be removed. He seems to view his interventions as professionally rather than culturally determined. Indeed, the poor quality of certain original passages is perceived to be due to a lack of professional diligence from Anglo-American editors and Massot thus sees himself as merely rectifying what escaped their notice. Yet, although Massot claims not to have resorted to formatting, his editing strategies seem to be informed by a precise understanding of what the topic and the hero of chick lit should be. In other words, in the same way as unacceptably vulgar elements need to be censored for chick texts to be publishable and broadcastable, unacceptably long and irrelevant elements need to be removed for TTs to be published by Florent Massot présente. The dominant poetics of a genre seem to be of considerable influence even in the most subversive editor's practices. As the next section will demonstrate, marketing practices seem to have had to negotiate a similar poetics as well as the literary elitist tradition which, as explained in Chapter 2 (section 2.1.1.), tends to scorn works with familiar formulas and overt advertising. As I shall show, the conceptual conflation of recognisable narrative formulas and explicit marketing enables one to identify initiators' marketing actions or lack thereof.

## **4.2. Marketing Actions**

### **4.2.1. Genre and Marketing**

Literary professionals' reluctance to use extensive marketing campaigns has been most visible in the case of *BJD*'s first French editor Tony Cartano. Cartano establishes an opposition between an authentic work of creativity such as *BJD*, a then 'produit totalement original et nouveau' (23/08/2006), and the *BJD*-inspired genre

which ‘va finir par se fatiguer et s’user, à force de devenir un sous-genre, d’être, comment dirais-je, galvaudé’ (Ibid.). Although he published both *BJD* and *SATC*, the two forerunning texts of chick lit, Cartano is the only editor interviewed for this research who did not create a ‘Comédie’ series around the genre and who finds the prospect of publishing other chick texts unappealing: ‘le terme de chick lit est plutôt péjoratif. Si, aujourd’hui, en 2006, un agent littéraire m’appelle pour me dire “j’ai un roman de chick lit”, je commence par faire la grimace [...]. Pourquoi? Parce que c’est devenu une littérature de genre’ (Ibid.). Publishing more chick lit novels would conflict with Albin Michel’s main approach to publishing literature: texts are selected ‘au coup par coup’ on the basis of their creative originality and quality (Ibid.). The labelling of a manuscript as chick lit implies similarities and recurrent features which would ultimately compromise the text’s uniqueness by locating it within a wider body of works: a *littérature de genre*. Cartano is thus informed by a fairly elitist and traditional notion of literature which considers a book worthy of publication only if it stands as an individual product. According to Duval, the classifiable nature of a text devalues its literary worth because attempts to define a novel are often conflated with attempts to sell the novel: ‘à partir du moment où, pour un français, un livre est catégorisé dans un genre, ça fait marketing [...], recette de cuisine, ça n’est plus valorisant comme “œuvre”’ (03/05/2006). In order to retain the value of a text, Albin Michel and other publishers concerned with artistic worth must thus be careful not to overtly establish links between a given novel and other works and must make sure that promotional campaigns are discreet enough so as to not lower the status of their books to the level of insignificant commodities.

The fact that *BJD* was originally published by Albin Michel has had several consequences on the initial marketing of chick lit in France. Whilst *BJD* was identified as chick lit as early as 1998 in the UK and the US, *BJD* was presented as a unique work by an internationally renowned author for the first two years of its existence on the French book market. In Massot’s words, ‘pendant très longtemps les gens ont cru que [*BJD*] était un phénomène isolé, c’est-à-dire que c’était vraiment *un* auteur et *un* livre et ils n’ont pas vu qu’il y avait un genre et que, en fait, elle a été la figure immergée’ (04/09/2006). Although *BJD* was published as early as 1998 in France, its initial discreet promotion means that to many, the existence of *BJD*

started with the release of its cinematic adaptation in 2000 (Cartano 23/08/2006). The dates given by *Lire* magazine in its special dossier on the ‘new’ chick lit genre are typical examples of this presumption: the literary journalist wrongly informs readers that *BJD* was initially published in 1997 in the UK and three years later in France (Peras 2006a: 45). Until the highly publicized release of the film *BJD* and Albin Michel’s second edition of the novel with the film’s poster on its cover, the French translation of *BJD* was thus not particularly visible. In fact, the bestseller does not seem to have been deemed popular enough to be worth a mention on the DVD cover of the French version of *BJD*, unlike the British cover which highlights that the film is ‘based on Helen Fielding’s wildly popular bestseller’. Interestingly, the DVD cover of the French version of *BJD* does make mention of another chick text: the heroine is defined as ‘une sorte de cousine anglaise d’Ally McBeal’. The French public has thus been assumed to be more familiar with this chick television series than with the novel on which the comedy was based.

The definition of Bridget Jones as an English cousin of another chick heroine is reminiscent of a marketing practice which, as explained in Chapter 1 (section 4.2.1.1), relies on drawing attention to a text’s similarity to earlier successful works and has played an important part in the development of chick lit as a genre in the UK and the US. A cursory look at the French covers of translated chick lit and French DVDs of chick texts suggests a much more parsimonious use of such a marketing strategy. In fact, the French DVD of *BJD* seems to be the only epitext (in Genette’s terms) of a French TT which establishes a link between two chick texts. I would like to suggest that the use of the brand-name identification ‘Ally McBeal’ on the French DVD cover of *BJD* indicates that, from a French point of view, a certain type of promotion may be more appropriate for audiovisual texts. Massot, for instance, was struck by the scale of marketing campaigns supporting newly published chick lit novels in Britain: ‘des lancements comme on lance *Mission Impossible*, le film, comme on lance les gros blockbusters d’Hollywood en France’ (04/09/2006). Although, as I will soon show, Massot is one of the only French publishers who resorted to relatively unconventional marketing strategies to promote his chick lit titles, he still finds that such campaigns would have been unfeasible in France (Ibid.).

As Massot, Fannius and Duval all created a 'Comédie' series around chick lit, it would be tempting to infer that, unlike Cartano, these young and innovative patrons did not operate according to the same elitist prejudices towards *littératures de genre*. However, Duval's and Fannius's responses suggest that they are paradoxically informed by the same literary principles as Albin Michel. Duval seems to 'know her place' in the publishing industry: she caters for 'des gens qui ont envie de lire de bonnes histoires, qui ont envie de se distraire, pas forcément de se cultiver [...] enfin y a Gallimard et y a le Fleuve Noir. C'est pas du tout, pas du tout le même but' (Duval 03/05/2006). Fleuve Noir's mission is thus to provide readers with novels whose entertaining nature mark them as less cultured than those published by Gallimard and other equally prestigious publishing houses. Fannius, the editor of J'ai lu's series 'Comédie' also seems to start from the principle that chick lit differs from more literary types of literature. She remarks that in order to read chick lit novels, one should not have 'une grande exigence littéraire évidemment mais bon, c'est pas ce que l'on leur demande' (26/04/2006). There seems to be a clear correlation here between chick lit, a genre perceived to be neither sophisticated nor literary and its publication under purposefully created 'Comédie' series. In other words, the perception of chick lit as a *littérature de genre* enabled its French initiators to publish the novels in the inevitably 'marketing-looking' series format. Although both Fannius and Duval belong to a new generation of editors, their practices could be argued to maintain the literary status quo: bringing several chick lit titles together under a 'Comédie' series as a first marketing strategy automatically devalued chick lit as a genre within French literature. As the next section will demonstrate, other strategies were employed which helped to crystallise translated chick lit's position within the literary system in France.

#### **4.2.2. Onerous Campaigns**

Realising that his 'Comédie' series had condemned the genre to the peripheral margins of the French literary system, Massot decided that the only way to increase the visibility of his chick lit titles was to play the system by its own rules. Massot initially wished to 'unbolt' the idea that laughter could not be artistic (04/09/2006) but his attempt to (re-)create a literary space for comedy within French literature was met by a number of 'réticences, [from] tous les intermédiaires, c'est-à-dire, la presse,

les libraires, la distribution' (Ibid.). He explains that the novelty of chick lit confused those who were most likely to have had a positive influence on its commercial success: booksellers and journalists (Ibid.). Booksellers did not know where and how to display the novels while journalists simply did not write about them (Ibid.). As sales figures remained low and the intermediaries' *réticences* made it difficult for Massot to achieve his initial aim, he decided to promote the novels as 'livres de plage' (Ibid.). Promotional campaigns rewarded the purchase of more than two novels with holiday-related gifts: bags, towels, sunscreens, flip-flops and even flavoured condoms (Ibid.). Massot remarks that while this bold and innovative marketing technique boosted sales and drew some of the media's attention (notably from television figures such as Christophe Dechavanne and Thierry Ardisson), it also raised concerns amongst *libraires* who felt they were being reduced to running 'des boutiques de plage' (Ibid.). Although Massot originally wanted to subvert the current poetics which defined humour as 'vulgaire' (Ibid.), he paradoxically needed to resort to the elitist distinction between insignificant entertainment (such as the beach) and serious culture in order to sell his novels. In making use of promotional methods deemed unacceptable for 'real' literature, Massot furthered chick lit's commercial appeal and thus its cultural marginalisation. Moreover, as the television journalists Dechavanne and Ardisson tend to be associated with light entertainment on French television rather than serious literariness (unlike 'Apostrophes' as explained in Chapter 2, section 2.1.2.), the attention Massot's methods received did not raise translated chick lit's profile in literary and publishing circles. As a result, one would have to wait for six years for chick lit to be named as such in the French mainstream media<sup>11</sup>.

Olivier's article, one of the only academic accounts of chick lit written in French reveals translated chick lit novels' invisibility between 2000 and 2005: as little as six journalistic articles seem to have appeared in these five years. Some of their titles are suggestive of the limited scope with which the genre was initially reported upon: 'Célibataires cherchent grand amour, tome 2' (Rodrigue 2000); 'Amours, sex and best-sellers' (Morere 2003); 'Harlequin tendance urbaine' (Nandrin 2003). In

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<sup>11</sup> The first mention of 'chick' itself in relation to literature seems to date back to a minor society of writers' newsletter entitled 'Un été chick et choc' published in July 2005.

contrast, the year 2006 seems to mark a turning point in the promotion of translated chick lit novels with the publication of articles and dossiers in magazines and newspapers such as *ELLE* (Frey and Goldszal 2006), *Le Parisien* (Andrieu 2006), *L'Express Livres* (Berthod 2006) and *Lire* (Peras 2006, 2006a, 2006b). This sudden increase of mainstream media attention actually reflects Fleuve Noir's growing initiative. In 2005, the publishing house recruited a new public relations manager, Nicolas Watrin, who has achieved, according to Duval, 'un merveilleux travail de communication' (Duval 03/05/2006):

il a envoyé des dépêches à l'AFP [L'Agence France Presse]. Il a constitué un dossier chick lit et il a construit un discours autour du phénomène et donc à force... c'est des rencontres depuis un an auprès des journalistes où [...] on leur fait croire qu'ils sont en train de passer à côté de quelque chose d'extraordinaire. Et pis finalement ben, ça mord. [...]. Y a eu tout un travail de préparation et de communication qui portent ses fruits au bout d'un an. Parce que *Le Diable s'habille en Prada*, c'était y a deux ans et personne n'a vraiment regardé ça. (Ibid.)

Duval's explanation highlights that the multiplication of journalistic articles about chick lit in 2006 is the result of the *directeur de la communication's* perseverance. As explained in Chapter 1 (section 2.3.), chick texts tend to originate from newspaper columns and/or be written by Anglo-American journalists themselves and chick lit novels are therefore reviewed before or as soon as they are published. Duval's response points to a somewhat different picture in France. As she remarks, even a successful chick lit novel such as *TDWP* had not attracted much media attention. The French media's coverage of chick lit thus emerges as a forced phenomenon and the result of insistent public relations work. Yet, if chick lit was largely invisible in the French media before 2006, the genre had achieved a certain level of visibility in French bookshops notably through a relatively homogenous packaging style. The following section examines this packaging in order to understand the visual appearance of chick lit upon its introduction into the French book market.

#### 4.2.3. Packaging

As Massot explains, chick lit novels' 'different' and comic nature had to be reflected on their covers: 'des couvertures [...] qui racontent [...] drôles, visibles, pleines de couleurs, à l'époque où il n'y en avait pas' (04/09/2006). The bright, colourful and

fun covers chosen for translated chick lit departed so much from the usual French sober and plain covers that they both stunned and appalled booksellers (Ibid.). As Appendix 10 shows, Florent Massot présente was not the only publishing house to have opted for acidic shades of blue, yellow, green or pink and brightly clad and made-up female models with exaggerated expressions of confusion, happiness, surprise or mischief. To an extent, French editions' bright and feminine colours echo those of Anglo-American covers. However, one element seems to differ: the use of photography. As explained in Chapter 1 (section 3.1.), cartoons of female silhouettes and feminine accessories on Anglo-American chick lit covers draw attention to the heroine's ordinary and identifiable nature: she could be any woman, including the female reader herself. Drawing on McCloud's work, I demonstrated how the simplistically drawn heroine pulls readers' identity and awareness into the fictional setting she inhabits. As McCloud observes, the abstract lines of simplistic drawings require more cognitive, interpretive and identifying efforts than photographs, which are comparatively received as pure visual input (1993: 49). If, like McCloud, one positions photographs of individuals at the opposite end from cartoons on a spectrum of readers' responses to images and if one considers that identification is a significant element in chick lit, the initial choice of photography for French covers becomes problematic. When asked why Fleuve Noir initially chose photos for its chick lit covers, Duval replies:

parce qu'on pensait que c'était bien et qu'en fait ça s'est avéré être une très mauvaise idée [...] je crois qu'on n'a pas réfléchi au problème. On a pensé que ça marcherait avec les photos, et en fait [...] les photos, c'est très...comment dire...très enfermant finalement parce que sur une photo, vous prenez le visage d'une fille, donc après c'est très subjectif, elle a l'air vulgaire, elle a l'air triste, elle a l'air ci, elle a l'air ça, vous n'arrivez pas à lui faire dire ce que vous voulez, alors que les illustrations c'est beaucoup plus souple pour illustrer comme on veut. (03/05/2006)

Photographs' perceived limitations here partially echo McCloud's theory of readers' responses to images. Although Duval does not mention identification *per se* here, her words suggest that the visual input of a photographed woman's brassy or sad expression somehow restricts interpretation and, unlike illustration, photographs appear inflexible in the way they can be perceived and received. Initial chick lit covers in France thus seem to have required little cognitive and interpretative efforts

on the part of potential buyers who could not be drawn into or relate to the otherness of an unknown model's face. The turning point in the development of French chick lit covers seems to be the publication of *TDWP* in 2004. By 2006, this novel had sold 100,000 copies in France (Peras 2006a: 45) and Duval largely attributes this success to the translation's illustrated cover which is identical to its original (03/05/2006)(see Appendices 21 and 22). Since then, other publishers have adopted an illustrating approach and as Appendix 11 shows, photographs have been gradually replaced by illustrations on more recent editions. In the light of this evolution, one wonders where the initial idea of using photographs rather than illustrations originated.

I would like to suggest that the first French covers of translated chick lit visually inscribed the novels in a system of recent romantic texts. Indeed, although photographs 'qui racontent' (Massot 04/09/2006) were perhaps relatively uncommon on French book covers at the time, one type of text could be said to make extensive use of narrative photography: the *roman-photo*. Photo-novels are stories told in photographs (Nye 1977: 744) and appear regularly in magazines such as *Confidences* and *Nous Deux*, generically called the *presse du cœur* (Holmes 2006: 74)(Constans 1999: 248). The front cover of *Confidences*, for instance, generally 'exhibe [...] un visage féminin cadré de près sur un fond peu spécifié' (Giet 2001). Photographs within the pages of photo-novels themselves are mainly of female individuals, posing woodenly and exaggerating their gestures (Nye 1977: 746-747). As Appendix 10 shows, both unspecified backgrounds and exaggerated poses are recurrent motifs on the first French covers of chick lit novels. The French packaging of chick lit could also be said to establish a connection to another recent form of romantic texts: the AB Productions sitcom. As explained in Chapter 2 (section 3.2.4.), the background of most AB Productions sitcoms was dominated by soft, bright and fun colours, drawing on the American campus setting (Pasquier 1994: 127) and creating 'an imagined French-Californian space' (Hayward 2002: 495). As Appendix 12 shows, the combination of soft and acidic shades of blue, yellow, green or pink and brightly clad and made-up female models on French chick lit covers echoes AB Productions sitcoms' decors and their actors' clothes. The exaggerated expressions affected by the models featuring on the covers of chick lit are also reminiscent of AB Productions sitcoms' actors themselves: inexperienced models delivering trite and



overplayed performances (Pasquier 1998: 217). The same colours and photographed models can be found on promotional displays such as the J'ai lu cardboard stand featured in Appendix 13. Located at the till of a bookshop and bringing together titles published under the 'Comédie' series, the display not only creates a visual identity for chick lit but also accentuates the genre's romantic element by advertising a competition aimed at single readers and centred around Valentine's Day. A cursory look at the blurbs of translated chick lit novels themselves also reveal an emphasis on an element common to both the photo-novel and the AB Productions sitcom: the exploration of romantic love in all its possible permutations via multiple intrigues (Chaniac and Jézéquel 1998: 33)(Pasquier 1994: 132-133)(Nye 1977: 747). Indeed, compared to British and American covers of chick lit novels, which stress the narratives' socio-cultural realism, observational humour and similarities with previous chick texts (Appendices 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7), the epitexts of translated chick lit tend to highlight the melodramatic and romantic nature of the plot, notably the relationship between the heroine and the hero (Appendix 14). Overall, chick TTs seem to be packaged in a way which differs from the exception which I will now examine in detail: the French translation of the novel *SATC*.

As noted in section 3.2., the book *SATC* seems to have been the only chick ST to be defined as informative by Cartano, the initiator of its French translation. The French TT's informative function, akin to that of a *reportage*, is reflected in the choice of its title: unlike other translations of chick lit novels whose titles are translated literally (*BJD: Le journal de Bridget Jones*), partially adapted (*MLOP: Ma vie sur un plateau*) or fully adapted (*MM: Mon cœur "ping-pong"*), the French translation retains the original title. A comparative analysis of the novel's French epitext and that of its British edition reveals how differently an informative text is packaged from an entertaining text. In Britain, *SATC* was marketed as chick lit (a genre the novel was claimed to have forerun): the dominant colours of its packaging are pastel and its front cover features a quote from Helen Fielding (Appendix 15). The appellative nature of the book is defined, in typical chick lit fashion, as 'funny', 'hilarious', 'poignant', 'observant' and a 'glorious drunken cocktail trail [with] glamorous, rebellious, crazy single women' (Appendix 15). Intertextual references such as Jane Austen, *Marie-Claire*, famous bars and designer shoes locate the novel

within pre-established entertaining discourses of femininity, fashion and high society parties. A picture of the series' four actresses standing on the blue lettered title filling the top third of the front cover constitutes the only reminder of the connection between the book and its televisual adaptation.

The French pocket edition of *Le Livre de poche* and the *Grand Format* (hereafter GF) edition of Albin Michel both present very different elements. The cover of Albin Michel's edition features a black and white photograph of an inexpressive Candace Bushnell in a black vest. The unsmiling author is nonchalantly lying on a bed, looking straight at the camera, supporting her head with one hand and holding a glass of champagne with the other (Appendix 16). The pocket edition front cover has a picture of the four actresses from the waist up. An unsmiling Sarah Jessica Parker, her hair in the wind, is at the centre, taking up half of the overall quartet and wearing a black top. Behind her, the other three actresses stand, smiling faintly and noncommittally to the camera. The background is black (Appendix 17). Both pocket and GF editions distinguish themselves from other translated chick lit novels' colourful covers and their female models with exaggerated expressions (Appendix 10). Significantly, the darkness implied by the French covers is echoed in the publishers' epitext, notably the back cover blurb (the same for both editions) which emphasises New-York's hostility, the disturbing and shocking nature of Bushnell's account and the deficiency of the society portrayed. The idea of loss is recurrent: the female members of this society have 'tout, sauf ce qu'elles cherchent désespérément: le partenaire idéal' and the narrative follows 'leurs états d'âme et leurs frasques sexuelles. Ou du moins ce qu'il en reste'. The last line encapsulates the blurb's tone: 'bienvenue dans l'ère de l'innocence perdue: un regard lucide et impitoyable sur une société qui fout décidément le camp' (Appendix 18). As the light-hearted cocktails and fashion disappear, *SATC* is defined as a sinister and unsettling book. The emphasis on the book's connection with the series is greater in the packaging of the French *poche* edition where the picture of the four actresses takes up two thirds of its front cover. Moreover, both editions remind the reader that *SATC* was 'un livre-culte avant d'inspirer une série télévisée'. Curiously, the back blurb also opens with the professions of the series' four heroines: 'journalistes, marchandes d'art, avocates, responsables de relations publiques' (Appendix 18) despite the fact that only one

heroine – Carrie Bradshaw – retains her profession in the process of adaptation (Merck 2004: 48-49)<sup>12</sup>. While the strategy of using pictures of the series' four lead actresses has been used by Anglo-American publishers, Anglo-American blurbs do not imply that the series' protagonists will be found in the book and in comparison, the French packaging suggests a more overt need to reach the viewing public of the series. Overall, one could advance that the marketing strategies employed by initiators of chick TTs were coherent with their general aims for the translations they commissioned.

## 5. Conclusion

In placing chick TTs in their immediate context of production, this chapter reveals a number of parameters which are of particular relevance to the comparative analysis of the following two chapters. Primarily initiated by young, innovative and female individuals, chick TTs could be said to have been introduced at the margins of the French cultural system. However, the gender, age and innovative tendencies of chick texts' French patrons do not mean that they altogether reject the dominant ideologies and poetics of their time. In fact, as this chapter has shown, their interpretative, selecting, editorial and marketing practices seem informed by the conservative principles of commercial viability, elitism and pleasurable fluidity. The general identification of chick STs as appellative romantic texts and the patrons' subsequent general aim have been influenced by two interrelated factors: first, an understanding of the French cultural system as lacking domestically produced romantic comedies and, second, a subsequent need to cater for a historically prosperous market which has survived and thrived in recent years primarily thanks to Anglo-American imports.

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<sup>12</sup> In the book, Charlotte is not an art dealer but a journalist, Miranda is not a lawyer but a cable executive and Samantha is not a public relations executive but a film producer. The change of profession of these three heroines in the series is one of several departures from the novel which have been noted (Merck 2004). While many of these departures have been explored (Grochowski 2004: 157)(Bignell 2004: 170), the reasons behind this particular change remain unclear and have yet to be investigated.

The definition of chick texts as modern romantic texts belonging to a *littérature de genre* also appears to have had a distinct impact on marketing strategies: the creation of series – a culturally devalued format – and the emphasis on chick TTs’ sentimentalism notably via covers visually reminiscent of more recent forms of French romantic texts. As this chapter has also revealed, the perceived text type and genre of chick texts seem to have lead to a number of conscious translational and editorial decisions in the process of production. The next two chapters detail some of these translational and editorial choices by presenting the results of a close comparative analysis between chick STs and chick TTs which has aimed to identify the strategies with the most adaptive effects as regards the representation of femininity. Bearing in mind that romantic texts have been culturally expected to provide young females with acceptable and desirable models of feminine heterosexuality, these two chapters concentrate on the translational and editorial treatment of femininity in both the public and private spheres and examine how the locating of texts in a specific genre can result in specific gender issues being flattened, circumvented or censored – in other words, rewritten.

## Chapter Four

### The Rewriting of Femininity in the Public Sphere

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter explores the rewriting of some of the most potentially progressive aspects of the representation of femininity in the public sphere in eight chick target texts: the first season of the series *SATC*; the novel *SATC* on which the series has been based; the novel *BJD*; its cinematic adaptation; the first twelve episodes of television series *AMB*; Jane Green's *MM*; India Knight's *MLOP*; and Lauren Weisberger's *TDWP*. As Chapter 1 (section 4.3.1.) has shown, female protagonists in chick texts display a number of common characteristics: aware of their status as beneficiaries of the feminist movement, heroines tend to be ambitious and career-focused individuals who enjoy flaunting their economic power. This chapter first looks at the French rendering of heroines' awareness of the feminist movement and particularly of feminist figures. It then turns to the concept of female power in the public sphere, concentrating on the French rendering of heroines' characterisation as career-driven and university-educated individuals. As will become clear in the comparative analysis, many of these categories effectively overlap but four issues can be clearly identified and are explored in this order: the career and home dichotomy; education; professional ambition and power; and economic prospects and power. Finally, the chapter examines and explains a number of exceptions to the main translational patterns before concluding on the wider socio-cultural and ideological implications of the findings. The number between square brackets for each audiovisual example refers to the subtitled target text provided in Appendix 19.

## 2. Comparative Analysis

### 2.1. Women's Rights and Feminism

This section examines the translational treatment of references to figures pertaining to feminist history and culture. A wide range of strategies seem to have been employed to deal with these references with various levels of concern in retaining and conveying allusions to feminism. The first example is from *MLOP* where the heroine is shocked at one of her friends' apparent lack of appreciation for the first major achievement of First Wave Feminism: female suffrage. This is her friend's response:

ST:

Don't start telling me about that boring Pankhurst woman.

(Knight 2000: 99)

TT:

Ne commence pas à m'ennuyer avec ça.

(Knight 2002: 98)

The deletion of Pankhurst seems here to indicate that 'the great battles [of] the emancipation of women have not been fought in the same way in France, a Latin country, and in the great Anglo-Saxon nations' (Badinter 1989: 126). While Pankhurst's name in the ST reflects how this feminist figure is associated with 'votes for women' in the British popular imagination (Purvis 2000: 109), the French points to a different context, one in which even Pankhurst's French counterpart, Hubertine Auclert, remains virtually unknown to the French public (Hause 1987: xviii). As Bard shows, Pankhurst and her followers were known across the English Channel for their alleged 'laideur physique et morale' (1999: 58). The way in which they physically and sometimes even fatally faced repression were highly disapproved of in France (Ibid.). Despite being victims of 'un déchaînement de violences physiques et verbales [and a] véritable intolérance de la société française face à la prise de la parole politique des femmes' (Klejman and Rochefort 1989: 268), French feminists were keen to dissociate themselves from their British counterparts (Bard 1999: 58). Moreover, the development of feminist ideas was particularly slow and limited amongst the French women who had sufficient social, financial and cultural capital to bring the suffrage campaign to fruition (Macknight 2007). The translational

treatment of Pankhurst's name, notably the choice of a vague 'ça' shows the extent to which 'la fluidité de la lecture rest[e] un critère prédominant' (Sarhou 2006: 222) in translation. It also highlights the perceived unimportance of such historical details, thus reflecting and reinforcing the abovementioned traditional attitude to women's political rights. The French translation denies readers access not only to the history of British women's suffrage but also that of French women's suffrage, therefore perpetuating a pervasive patriarchal myth in France: women have no history (Ripa 2002: 85).

Pankhurst is not the only feminist figure to be deleted from a chick TT. Here, three characters from the series *SATC* – Samantha, Miranda and Carrie – discuss the legitimacy of accepting money from a male sexual partner.

ST:

Samantha: What are you getting so uptight about? I mean, money is power, sex is power. Therefore, getting money for sex is simply an exchange of power.

Miranda to Carrie: Don't listen to dime store Camille Paglia.

TT:

Samantha: C'est ridicule d'être aussi étroite d'esprit. Quand même l'argent, c'est le pouvoir. Le sexe, c'est le pouvoir. Donc quand on te paye pour le sexe, c'est uniquement un échange de pouvoir.

Miranda to Carrie: Surtout n'écoute pas ce genre de boniments terribles.

(*SATC* Episode 5 'The Power of Female Sex' [1])

In this example, the choice of 'boniments' in the sense of 'argumentation ingénieuse d'un camelot faisant l'article de sa marchandise [...]'. Tout discours plus ou moins artificieux visant à persuader, séduire, tromper [...]. Propos insignifiants' (*Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé: TLFi*) could be considered a judicious choice as an equivalent for deprecatory 'dime store'. Moreover, the adjective 'terrible' could be seen as reinforcing Miranda's reprobation of Samantha's argument. However, while original Samantha asks what aspect of Carrie's situation makes Miranda 'anxious and angry in an overly controlled way' (*Oxford English Dictionary: OED*), French Samantha dismisses Miranda and her opinion as ridiculous and narrow-minded. What's more, the disappearance of Camille Paglia suggests that retaining her name or substituting it with a cultural equivalent has been deemed impossible in the French

dubbing. The average French viewer is thus assumed to be unacquainted with the ‘féministe ennemie des féministes’ (Guilbert 2002: 243) and the debate she has triggered in media, feminist and academic circles, notably her dismissal of the idea of sexuality as a site of oppression for women (Phillips 1998: 6). Tellingly, the name of Camille Paglia is retained in the French subtitles (Appendix 19 [1]), suggesting that French viewers of subtitled programmes are expected to be more familiar or willing to familiarise themselves with Paglia’s existence and work. A similar strategy of omission and paraphrase is employed in the following example from the novel *TDWP*:

ST:

Someone like Nora Ephron or Wendy Wasserstein was much likelier to get VIP treatment than someone known for her impeccable taste in fur.

(Weisberger 2003: 83)

TT:

Une réalisatrice de ‘film d’auteur’, par exemple, avait plus de chances d’obtenir un traitement de faveur qu’une femme connue pour son goût infaillible en matière de fourrures.

(Weisberger 2004: 106)

In this passage, ‘someone like Nora Ephron or Wendy Wasserstein’ becomes ‘a female director of art house films’. This paraphrase is interesting on two levels. Firstly, playwright Wendy Wasserstein does not seem to have ever directed films while film directing is only one of the activities for which Nora Ephron is famous: she is also a journalist, an essayist, a novelist and a screenwriter. Her films tend to be mainstream romantic and family comedies such as *Cookie* and *When Harry Met Sally* and would not normally be defined as ‘art house’. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, both Ephron and Wasserstein are linked to feminism and the women’s movement. Despite Ephron’s potentially conservative emphasis on romance, her work also tends to feature strong female characters, an element which she sees as central to the appeal of modern comedies (Seger 2003: 96). As a journalist, Ephron has been described as ‘rigorous and feminist’ (Nadelson 1992: 15). Involved in the 1970s women’s movement, she famously interfered in the feud between Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem (Brockes 2007: 11). Wasserstein is a feminist playwright and a ‘household’ name in the US (Brown 1996: 6) credited for putting ‘women’s life choices under the lens’ (Coveney 2006: 35). Her plays have been the object of a



number of academic studies and could be said to have entered the canon of feminist drama (Balakian 1999)(Mandl 1999). The presence of Nora Ephron and Wendy Wasserstein in the ST is thus significant: not only does it indicate that the average Anglo-American reader is assumed to be familiar with their names but it also shows a cultural context in which mainstream popularity and feminism are not antonymous. The shift from ‘Nora Ephron or Wendy Wasserstein’ to ‘une réalisatrice de “film d’auteur”’ seems to point to a different context. French readers are not expected to be familiar or to wish to familiarise themselves with the names and works of these women. If ‘une réalisatrice de “film d’auteur”’ is indeed intended to paraphrase the names of Ephron and Wasserstein, one wonders to what extent the woman-oriented or feminist issues explored in their work influenced the translational decision of replacing their mainstream fame with ‘art house’ marginality. Although the TT does not reject the possibility of female creativity, it not only marginalises it but also denies French readers access to real feminist and creative women’s names.

Not all French versions of chick texts omit or paraphrase references to important figures of feminist history and culture. In the following example from *BJD*, the name of a famous feminist is retained. Here, Bridget’s mother, Pamela Jones, resents her husband for not appreciating her lifelong efforts and sacrifices as a wife and a homemaker. As she is estranged from him and he has decided to have lunch with Bridget on the same day as her, she cancels her original plans to see her daughter and bitterly contemplates an alternative activity:

ST:  
 I’ll just clean the house like Germaine sodding Greer and the Invisible Woman.  
 (Fielding 1998: 47)  
 TT:  
 Je ferai le ménage, comme cette salope de Germaine Greer et la Femme invisible.  
 (Fielding 2003: 56)

In this example, it is unclear whether Pamela Jones misnames Greer’s controversial book *The Whole Woman* or whether she refers to *The Change: Women, Aging and the Menopause* in which Greer argues that the Western media culture’s obsession with youth and beauty tends to make older women invisible. Given Pamela Jones’s

grievance with her husband, the second interpretation appears more plausible. Two elements are noteworthy in the French translation. Firstly, the absence of a footnote leaves the notion of the invisible woman unexplained and does not enlighten the reader as to Germaine Greer's status as a feminist activist, author and figure in the mainstream media. This is particularly problematic since, as I will show in the next example, the name Germaine Greer is unlikely to be familiar to the French general public. Secondly, although the French does not deny the reader access to Germaine Greer's name, the mistranslation of 'sodding' greatly undermines Greer's integrity. Indeed, whilst 'sodding' functions as a submodifier to emphasise Bridget's mother's anger at the situation in the original, 'cette salope de' is an insult to Greer in the French. In other words, French Pamela Jones seems to direct her anger at Greer as though she were somehow to blame for her subordinate and unappreciated role as a wife and homemaker.

The adaptation of this particular passage in the film *BJD* presents an interesting case:

ST:

Pamela Jones: I'm like the grasshopper who sang all summer. Like Germaine sodding Geer.

Bridget Jones: Greer.

TT:

Pamela Jones: Je suis comme la cigale qui a chanté tout l'été et qui n'a plus rien. Et moi, je [indistinct: veux or vais] être Simone de Bavoïr.

Bridget Jones: de Beauvoir.

(*BJD* [2])

As explained in Chapter 3, the dubbing of cinematic texts is overseen by supervisors who ensure that French versions respect the original meaning and integrity (Taïeb in Justamand 2006: 97). As a result, French dubbing has been increasingly 'faithful' (Savdié in Justamand 2006c: 65). This increased faithfulness seems to have motivated the dubbing author to resort to a cultural counterpart and an equivalent wordplay (de Bavoïr/de Beauvoir for Geer/Greer). Although this strategy departs from the treatment of feminist figures explored above, one should note that the dubbing actress's awkward and hasty delivery obscures the full meaning of the reference. Certainly, the reference does not seem to have been clear to the professional(s) who produced the subtitled version for viewers with impaired hearing

(Appendix 19 [2]). Indeed, unlike the other audiovisual texts in this study, *BJD* has two subtitled versions. One is based on the original English version and is aimed at viewers interested in the original dialogue<sup>1</sup>. The other subtitled version is explicitly aimed at viewers with impaired hearing and is based on the French dubbed version. In this second subtitled version, who corrects whom and the connection between feminism and Pamela Jones's situation is unclear, suggesting that the dubbing's ambiguity is perhaps deliberate. Nevertheless, the dubbed version presents an interesting departure from the previously discussed translational treatment of feminist references. In many ways, it demonstrates that in order to maintain the original version's meaning, cultural equivalents can indeed be found.

Another type of substitution is present in the next example from the series *SATC* where the names of famous women here provide a humorous contrast between important figures of the American media and an unknown and uncooperative restaurant hostess:

ST:

The most powerful woman in New York is not Tina Brown or Diane Sawyer or even Rosie O'Donnell. It's the hostess at Balzac – which had overnight become the only restaurant that mattered.

TT:

La femme la plus puissante de New York n'est ni Tina Turner, ni Naomi Campbell ni même Hillary Clinton. C'est l'hôtesse du Balzac qui est devenu du jour au lendemain le top des restaurants.

(*SATC* Episode 5 'The Power of Female Sex' [3])

The names of Brown, Sawyer and O'Donnell are here significant. Brown – who was editor of *The New Yorker* in 1998 – has been considered one of the most powerful British women abroad by *The Guardian* (Anon 1996: 9) while the television journalist Sawyer has featured twice in *Forbes*'s list of the world's most powerful women (Hensher 2004: 33). Although they are not feminists *per se*, Brown and Sawyer are both powerful women in the traditionally masculine fields of publishing and political journalism. Interestingly, for the joke to be effective in French, they are replaced by two internationally famous American women – a singer and a

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, on the DVD of *BJD* distributed in France, this subtitled version can be viewed in conjunction with the original version but not the French dubbed version.

supermodel – relocating their power to a much less valued field: that of entertainment. The last of these three famous women is the television celebrity and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights’ activist Rosie O’Donnell whose political agenda has been described as ‘staunchly feminist left’ (Krum 2001: 11). Her name is substituted with another internationally famous American female: Hillary Clinton, who was then the First Lady of the United States. Although Clinton has arguably been the most politically involved American First Lady, in the late 1990s, her political power could be seen to derive from her husband’s status rather than her own. In any case, the substitution considerably weakens the homosexual feminist radicalism originally implied by the name of O’Donnell.

Whilst the examples have dealt with the translational treatment of references to important feminist figures, the next and final example shows how an important feminist organisation has been rendered. In this passage from *AMB*, Ally attempts to discredit the soundness of her own relationship advice by describing herself in the following terms:

ST:

I am a strong working career girl who feels empty without a man. The National Organization for Women, they have a contract out on my head.

TT:

Je passe ma vie à travailler. Professionnellement, c’est génial mais je suis sans mari. L’organisation de la femme indépendante pourrait me choisir comme égérie.

(*AMB* Episode 6 ‘The Promise’ [4])

As I will develop in the following section, the concept of career in Ally’s self-definition has disappeared in the dubbing. Ally is transformed from a woman hated by a real feminist activist group to one glorified by a non-existent organisation for the independent woman. The subtitles tell a rather different story (Appendix 19 [4]): Ally’s feeling of loneliness without a man would also earn her the scorn of a feminist organisation: the MLF. This contrast has two interrelated implications. Firstly, in order to convey the original idea to the intellectual minority, a cultural substitution has been chosen. Secondly, in a way which echoes the previously discussed translational treatment of Pankhurst’s name, the dubbed version does not make use of

a cultural equivalent, despite the obvious existence of such an equivalent. This strategy could be said to demonstrate ‘l’image très négative qu’il [the MLF] a toujours dans l’opinion’ (Bard 1999: 301), despite being considered less aggressive than Anglo-American equivalent movements (Ezekiel 2002: 352). At the core of the MLF’s unpopularity was the separatist threat it posed to the ideology of Republican universalism (Bard 1999: 304)<sup>2</sup> and the representation of its members as hysterical, physically unattractive and sexually dissatisfied witches (Castelain-Meunier 1988: 69)(Bard 1999: 309). Average French viewers of *AMB* are therefore assumed to be unfamiliar or unwilling to familiarise themselves with two concepts: the feminist argument according to which women should unlearn their emotional dependence on men and the French equivalent of an American feminist activist group. As I will explain in the following section, this example from *AMB* is also reflective of an ambiguous translational treatment of the figure of the professional woman in the French versions of chick texts.

## **2.2. Female Power in the Public Sphere**

### **2.2.1. The Career and Home Dichotomy**

This section will examine the tension between the private and the public spheres in women’s lives as articulated in chick texts. The focus will be on the prevalent dichotomy of career vs. home which appears to have been reinforced via specific translational strategies in chick TTs. As mentioned in the previous section’s last example, the shift from ‘I am a strong working career girl who feels empty without a man’ to ‘Je passe ma vie à travailler. Professionnellement, c’est génial mais je suis sans mari’ does not address the concept of career. It also focuses on a specific interpretation of what Ally does rather than what she is. Her strength is deleted and her professional life (its greatness undermined by the fact that it is due to her overworking) is conveyed at the expense of her love life: she is without a husband. This is not the case in the original and in the French subtitles where, as already shown, Ally appears aware of the antifeminist implication of feeling empty without a man. Moreover, the French subtitles do not represent Ally’s successful professional life at the expense of her love life or indeed free time and equally contrasts her

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<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of Republican universalism, see Godin and Chafer (2004: xv-xviii), Majumdar (2004), Hargreaves (1997).

success in the public sphere with her neediness in her private life (Appendix 19 [4]). In the dubbing, however, Ally's devotion to her work is set against the fact that she is husbandless. In other words, Ally is a professional but not a wife. Importantly, Ally's independence, which is taken for granted in the original, is stressed in the French dubbing to the point of being an inspiration. It is as though Ally, as a lawyer, occupied the highest professional position women could be inspired to achieve. Average French viewers are thus assumed to be more familiar with the idea of female independence than that of a strong professional female. The choice of *la femme indépendante* also suggests the extent to which women's roles are understood and defined in relation to men. A single man's independence is rarely brought to the attention for an independent man is simply a man. A self-supporting husbandless woman, however, is defined as independent as though, without the adjective *indépendante*, a woman would otherwise be assumed to depend on someone else. The model proposed by professional and husbandless Ally here seems to be opposed to a more familiar and desirable model: the dependent wife. The emphasis on Ally's independence might also stem from the dubbers' perception of the character as a romantic working heroine. Indeed, as explained in Chapter 2 (section 2.2.6.), mass-market romances enjoyed great popularity in France in the 1980s, especially after the arrival of Harlequin and the emergence of similar publishing houses (Paizis 1998a: 20). According to the dominant poetics of the genre, the archetypical heroine of novels set in the workplace was a 'jeune fille moderne, **indépendante**, qui travaille [...] avec un tout petit talent' (Paizis 1998a: 36, my emphasis). Independence and limited competence rather than strength or career drive are therefore more familiar poetological elements in romantic texts. One could thus argue that the strong working career girl is rewritten into the independent working girl in order to conform to this poetics.

This poetics actually seems to inform a number of translational strategies regarding the professional representation of women. The word 'career' when related to women seems to have undergone many changes in the process of translation from English into French. In *MM*, Libby recalls the early stages of her career:

ST:

I used to have these dreams about being a career woman.  
 (Green 1999: 04)  
 TT:  
 J'ai toujours mis un point d'honneur à réussir ma carrière.  
 (Green 2001: 10)

Not only does the French delete the notion of career woman but it also becomes more explicatory, focusing on Libby's commitment rather than Libby's prospective identity. In the French TT, *being* a career woman is elaborated into what a career woman *does* and the gendered sense of 'career woman' is lost. Similarly, the translator of *BJD* seems to have needed to specify what Bridget's mother meant by:

ST:  
 I want a career.  
 (Fielding 1998: 71)  
 TT:  
 Je veux travailler, m'accomplir professionnellement.  
 (Fielding 2002: 82)

Like the dubbed version of *AMB*, the translation avoids using the term 'career'. Yet, as the following entry from the English to French section of the *Collins-Robert* (*C&R*) dictionary demonstrates, the concept of career does exist in the French language and culture:

Career:  
 1. N. a (= *profession, occupation*) carrière, profession **journalism is his career** il fait carrière dans le journalisme **he is making a career (for himself) in advertising** il est en train de faire carrière dans la publicité  
 b. (= *life, development, progress*) vie, carrière **he studied the careers of the great [men]** il a étudié la vie des grands hommes **his university career** sa carrière universitaire. (Varrod and Sinclair 2000: 128)

The examples to illustrate the meaning of career leave no doubt as to the cultural gender of the notion: career emerges as exclusively male. Examples in dictionaries and other educational books are famous for representing conservative gender roles (Rignault and Richert 1997)(Campbell 2004). Campbell, in particular, notes that 'dans le champ sémantique de la famille [...], l'établissement des garçons passe par une carrière réussie. Celui des filles par le mariage' (2004: 66-67) and that 'la femme chez *Robert et Collins* n'a pas accès à la vie publique' (2004: 73). She concludes that this is mainly because these entries have been rarely updated since the

1960s (2004: 74-75). However, the third and last part of the entry ‘career’ reveals more than anachronic conservativeness and shows how lexicographers’ choices reflect and reinforce a certain ideology:

3. COMP **career girl** N. jeune femme ambitieuse **she's a career girl** elle s'intéresse avant tout à sa carrière, elle est très ambitieuse  
**career woman** N. femme qui s'intéresse avant tout à sa carrière. (Varrod and Sinclair 2000: 128)

This entry indicates that there is no direct equivalent in French for the English phrase ‘career women/girls’. The two different French definitions as well as the length of the second one (nine words) suggest that the concept is problematic. Linguists have shown that semantic complexity is rarely reflected by morphological complexity (Baker 2002: 22). In fact, ‘languages automatically develop very concise forms for referring to complex concepts if the concepts become important enough to be talked about often’ (Ibid.). The inability to define women by their career in this third sub-entry could therefore indicate that situations in which women are defined by their career are not frequent enough in cultures where French is spoken<sup>3</sup>. Yet, this does not appear to be the case in all French speaking cultures. In French Canadian, the literal translation of ‘career woman’, *femme de carrière*, exists and is a commonly used noun phrase. It is therefore linguistically possible to convey the concept of professional women in French. However, as the exclusively male examples of the first sub-entry demonstrate, being career-driven seems to be more culturally acceptable and desirable for men. The various translations of the ‘career woman’ figure found in chick TTs suggest that the ambivalence and traditionalism with which French lexicologists treated the concept in the 1960s<sup>4</sup> was still shared by French translators and dubbing authors at the turn of the twenty-first century.

In the novel and film *BJD*, ‘you career girls!’ (Fielding 1998: 11)(Fielding 1998: 172) is translated by ‘ces filles qui ne pensent qu’à leur carrière!’ (Fielding 2002: 18)

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<sup>3</sup> Other bilingual dictionaries seem to confirm this. The *Oxford Hachette* defines the career woman as a ‘femme qui se consacre à sa vie professionnelle’ (Correard and Grundy 2001: 1031) while both *Harraps* and *Larousse* translate career woman as ‘femme ambitieuse ou qui ne pense qu’à sa carrière’ (White 2000: 128) (Carnay 1993: 117-118).

<sup>4</sup> The earliest example of the phrase ‘career woman’ itself given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is 1937, a year after the release of *Career Woman*, an American court case film featuring a woman as the main lawyer.



‘ces femmes qui ne pensent qu’à leur carrière’ (Fielding 2002: 191), ‘ces filles qui n’ont que leur carrière en tête’ (*BJD* [5]). This suggests that in order to make the notion understandable to French readers and viewers, what a career woman *is* needs to be explicated into what a career woman *does*. Moreover, the restrictive adverbial phrase *ne...que* implies that, by focusing on her career, a professional girl rejects other important and obvious matters. This echoes the French dubbing of *AMB* where Ally’s professional life is presented at the expense of her love life.

The shifts of meaning in the French translations and dubbings – especially the underlying notion that a career-focused female neglects other feminine roles – could be ideologically and historically explained. Indeed, the representations of these roles seem to have remained more traditional in France than in Anglo-American cultures and nowhere is this conservatism more noticeable than in the French media (Hayward 1990: 103)(Holland 1997: 147)(Blöss and Frickey 2006: 121). The Republican ideology and the Catholic religion appear to have shaped a number of French popular ideological norms and both have historically promoted women’s confinement to the private sphere (Hause and Kenney 1984: 259)(Lelièvre and Lelièvre 1991: 109-110). The Catholic Right and nationalists such as the New and Extreme Right continue to advocate traditional gender roles and a patriarchal society (Smith 2000: 47-60). While these may be seen as extreme on the political spectrum, the relative popularity of *Le Front National*<sup>5</sup> suggests that their values do retain a certain appeal. According to such values, nature and divine law gives men and women different hierarchical and complementary functions (Ibid.). The ideal woman is ‘a faithful wife, a fertile mother and [...] lover for her man’ (Kofman 1998: 95) and should possess ‘qualities of submission [and] passivity’ (Ibid.). As I have shown in Chapter 2 (sections 2.2.1. and 2.2.6.), gender hierarchy in favour of men and female submission and passivity have been the precise ideological values promoted by romantic texts (from the sentimental novel to Delly’s romances) to such an extent that these have long been considered essential poetological elements to the romantic genre. Outwith the fictional realm, women’s entry into the workforce is still regularly blamed for the decline of the sacred family structure and the rise of unemployment

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<sup>5</sup> A radical right-wing political party which was considerably visible and gathered a relatively large percentage of support and in the 1980s and 1990s.

(Castelain-Meunier 1988: 70)(Dudovitz 1989: 160-2)(Ripa 2002: 40-41). The recent governmental policies to encourage women's return to the home (Holland 1997: 142-144)(Ashley 2003: 26) suggest that the establishment itself still views women's place as housewives and mothers as socially necessary.

Yet, historically, French women have always worked (Schweitzer 2002)(Ripa 2002: 38)(Bard 2004: 20)(Ferrand 2004: 10) and women's employment in masculine fields was particularly high during WWI (Ripa 2002: 38). However, unlike Britain where women were partially granted the vote in return of their war effort, French women's war effort did not lead to such emancipation until WWII (Bard 2004: 154). The fact that 'les femmes remplacent les hommes' (Bard 2004: 20) during WWI was actually greeted with great suspicion and both the media and the State stressed the substitutive and exceptional nature of women's work (Ripa 2002: 63)(Ferrand 2004: 11). After the war, the popular image of the *ménagère* and *ange du foyer* emerged along with pro-natalist discourses, supported by contemporary women's organisations (Bard 2004: 52-58). Aggressive pro-family policies were introduced, amongst which *les allocations familiales* which still exist today (Ibid.). Despite the 7.7 million French working women before 1914, the myth according to which women only entered the workforce during the Great War persists in history schoolbooks nowadays (Ripa 2002: 63-64). This myth has also impacted on the way in which France has perceived American women's situation. Historically, American women seem to have always worked more than French women from a French point of view (Harter 2001: 46). However, as Harter points out, American women's perceived greater employment cannot be numerically explained: only 21% of American women against 37% of French women worked in 1900 (Ibid.). This misconception seems due to the nature of some American women's work:

plus que le travail féminin, c'est la diversité des métiers ouverts aux femmes américaines qui étonne les Européens. Ces dernières sont nombreuses dans les bureaux des administrations et des entreprises. On trouve aussi des femmes avocats ou médecins. (2001: 46)

If, statistically, there were no more female workers in the US than in France, there seemed to be more American women in traditionally masculine and visible fields such as administration, business, law and medicine. As I will demonstrate in the

following section, French women seem to have had comparatively less access to the type of education that could have facilitated their entry into such fields.

It is commonly thought that the post-WWII experience of women has been remarkably similar across the West in the general insistence that they should return to the home (McNeill 1998). Such an assumption however overlooks that, under occupied France, women had not left the home as such. While Anglo-American governments called upon women's duty to participate in the war effort by working outside the home in typically male jobs in order to allow more men to join the forces, the Vichy government officially limited women's access to work (Bard 2004: 136-7)(Ferrand 2004: 12). The 'Domestic Ideal' propaganda after the liberation of France was therefore one of continuity (McNeil 1998) with the traditional gender roles advocated by Petain's 'Travail, Famille, Patrie' ideology which, as Ripa aptly points out, should be understood as 'le travail aux hommes, la famille aux femmes, la patrie, devoir de tous' (2002: 40). Although British and American women were coerced back into housewifery and motherhood after the war, they had more historical proof of their ability to perform a man's job. If France has never lacked women who work, French culture seems to have historically lacked positive images of women working, especially in masculine and prestigious professions. The rare female lawyers and doctors at the beginning of the twentieth century were often the object of mockery (Bard 1999: 51), contempt (Macknight 2007: 137) and fear (Thébaud 1986: 292). All these reactions point to the fact that from a French point of view, these women 'symbolisent l'ambition des femmes nouvelles sacrifiant l'amour et la maternité à leur carrière' (Bard 1999: 51). Career and ambition have thus been historically posited as antonymous to two essential female models: the lover and the mother.

The alleged novelty of female work and the naturalness of 'l'idée, ancrée au fond de l'inconscient que la place des femmes est à la maison' (Ripa 2002: 41) is present throughout the translations. In *BJD*, British married people 'conspire to make us [career girls] feel stupid' for not being married and washing 'anyone else's socks' (Fielding 1998: 42). In the French, couples more radically 'conspirent pour qu'on se sente anormale' for not 'laver les chaussettes de leurs conjoints' (Fielding 2002: 51).

The shift from stupidity to abnormality suggests that single career girls' situation goes more strongly against French ideological norms. Moreover, the choice of 'conjoint' over *quelqu'un d'autre* confirms the 'complementary' nature of women's roles in relation to men. The following example from *AMB* presents a similarly interesting case of subtle transformation:

ST:

Renée: Being unmarried isn't a stigma to men. Eligible bachelor, old maid. Society drills it into us that women should be married, society drills it into us that smart people should have careers, society drills it into us that women should have children and mothers should stay at home. And society condemns the working mother that doesn't stay at home. So, what chance do we really have when society keeps on drilling us?

TT:

Renée: Sauf que pour eux ce n'est pas un problème. On dit un 'bon parti' et une 'vieille fille'. La société nous met dans la tête que les femmes doivent se marier. Elle nous met dans la tête que les gens diplômés doivent travailler. Elle nous met dans la tête qu'on doit faire des enfants et rester à la maison. Et la société désapprouve les mères qui travaillent au lieu de rester chez elles. On n'a pas le choix, ce sont les seuls modèles que nous propose la société.

(*AMB* Episode 10 'Boy to the World' [6])

At first glance, the dubbing seems similar in content to the original, but when scrutinised, slight differences emerge. In the TT, unshameful male singleness becomes unproblematic, which lessens the original idea of a different system of value for single men and women. The dubbing also reflects French socio-cultural reality in its insistence that people who have studied and therefore earned 'diplomas' *must* make the most of their qualifications in the job market. This reinforces the French *culte des diplômes* and departs from the original suggestion that smart people *should* make the most of their intellectual ability to pursue a career. The choice of 'doivent' over the conditional *devraient* is similarly telling. Although society is blamed in both original and dubbed texts, a sense of generic duty of a potentially all-inclusive *on* rather than the imposition of a questionable judgement on 'women' prevails in the dubbing. The issue of working motherhood is also rendered differently. Although equally disapproved of in the ST and the TT, the mother who works and who does not stay at home becomes the mother who works *instead of* staying at home in the French, suggesting that staying at home as a mother is already

in the natural order of things. The dubbing also clearly states that there are no other social choices for women as these are the only ‘modèles’. In contrast, Renée’s original rhetorical question, which was maintained in the subtitles (Appendix 19 [6]), conveys a problematic pressure based on an unfair social judgement rather than a unique social model to follow.

The translations could be said to reflect different social expectations for women especially as regards their professional identity which, in order to be intelligible to a general French public, needs to be portrayed at the expense of women’s ‘other’ roles. In 1989, 57% of the French still disapproved of female employment (Bard 2004: 225). Although mentalities evolve with generations, values regarding working women seem to remain largely defined in relation to their roles as wives and mothers. Ten years later, over 20% of the French population completely agreed that a child under school-age was likely to suffer if his mother worked and that although a job was ‘good’ for a woman, what she desires above all else is to fulfil her role of homemaker and mother (Herpin 2003: 81). Views such as ‘les femmes sont faites pour être mères’ (Ripa 2002: 17-22), ‘la place des femmes est à la maison’ (Ripa 2002: 37-42) and the consequent ‘le travail des femmes est contre-nature’ (Ripa 2002: 60) do not need to be openly admitted to exist, they are found behind

le convenu ‘vous avez des enfants?’ posé aux seules femmes lors d’une première rencontre quand on s’enquiert dans le même temps de la profession des hommes. On [les] perçoit à la mine contrite que provoque la réponse par la négative. (Ripa 2002: 41)

The comment made in 1998 by a female interviewer to Pierre Bourdieu over the antithesis of the homemaker and the mother, *la femme P-D.G.*, reveals how the notion of a professionally successful woman naturally sacrificing housewifery and motherhood persists in French popular ideology: ‘il va de soi qu’une femme qui a de grosses responsabilités professionnelles doit sacrifier autre chose’ (Portevin 1998). The following sections will examine to what extent this notion goes without saying and will look at the way in which translators and dubbing authors have dealt with this perceived ‘sacrifice’ notably in relation to women’s education, ambition and power.

### 2.2.2. Education

The translations seem to control this ‘sacrifice’ by lowering female characters’ level of education as well as their professional ambition and importance. As previously mentioned, the university education of most chick heroines is a central aspect of their identity. This aspect is commonly reinforced by comments and references in conversations which are rarely related to the topic of education itself. The dubbed version of *SATC* seems to be the chick TT where these references have undergone the most manifest transformations. On two separate occasions, when characters recall an experience they had while ‘in college’ the American ‘college’ becomes ‘au lycée’ in the French dubbing while the subtitles of these segments retain the original level of education: ‘à la fac’, ‘à l’université’ (*SATC* Episode 5 ‘The power of female sex’ [7])(*SATC* Episode 8 ‘Three’s a crowd’ [8]). This reference to high school is also fairly incongruous in the first instance where Charlotte responds to an artist who is surprised by her familiarity with his work. The shift from ‘I studied you in college!’ to ‘J’ai tout étudié sur vous quand j’étais au lycée’ not only fails to convey Charlotte’s standing as an Arts graduate but also implies that high school students learn in depth (‘tout’) about the most recent modern art. Indeed, although it would not be unusual for the work of a contemporary painter to be taught at undergraduate or postgraduate level while he or she is alive, an artist would need to enter the canon before entering school curricula, a feat very few achieve in their lifetime. In the following example, Miranda is asked to analyse an ambiguous message left on her friend’s answering-machine. This is what she replies:

ST:

I have no idea. And I finished first in my litigation class.

TT:

Impossible à dire. Et pourtant j’étais première en explication de texte.

(*SATC* Episode 4 ‘Valley of the Twenty-Something Guys’ [9])

In the same way as Charlotte draws attention to her university education, Miranda here refers to her analytical and mediating abilities and her achievement as a law student. Yet, as she points out, the message is so vague that even her litigating skills do not enable her to determine its exact meaning. In the French, the university litigation course which Miranda excelled in becomes ‘explication de texte’, an

exercise most typically done in high school which involves the close and detailed reading of a given literary text. Although this exercise certainly requires an aptitude for analysis and interpretation, the sense of accomplishment is considerably lessened. The same could be said about the next example where the heroines discuss whether the practice of anal sex is degrading to women. Here, Charlotte expresses her shock at Samantha's controversial suggestion that all body orifices are potentially designed for pleasure:

ST:

What are you talking about? I went to Smith!

TT:

Qu'est-ce que vous racontez? J'ai grandi chez les bonnes sœurs!

(*SATC* Episode 4 'Valley of the Twenty-Something Guys' [10])

While both the ST and the TT convey that Samantha's idea is at odds with Charlotte's extended experience in an exclusively female environment, the shift from 'Smith' to 'les bonnes sœurs' transforms a university education into a Catholic schooling following the pattern described above. The French dubbing suggests a different understanding of single-sex educational settings and one wonders whether it is due to a confusion between 'sœurs' and Smith College as a member of the historic Seven Sisters<sup>6</sup>. Yet, a college such as Smith and a nunnery have little more in common than the female gender of their students. Education by the nuns would typically prepare girls to their role as wives and mothers (Blöss and Frickey 2006: 20)(Lelièvre and Lelièvre 1991: 196), on the principle that 'il n'est pas bon que les femmes en sachent trop' (Blöss and Frickey 2006: 20). This type of education, quantitatively and qualitatively inferior to that provided to boys, aimed to protect and maintain female 'purity' and innocence (Lelièvre and Lelièvre 1991: 25). This could not be more different from a college like Smith which, from its origins in 1871, has been 'for the higher education of young women, with the design to furnish for [the founder Sophia Smith's] own sex means and facilities for education equal to those which are afforded now in our Colleges to young men' ([www.smith.edu](http://www.smith.edu)). Thus, while nunneries historically limited women's prospects and perpetuated gender

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<sup>6</sup> a group of American women's colleges founded in the nineteenth century.

inequality, Smith historically sought to remedy this inequality. Smith is still today committed to promoting female achievement in the public sphere and its alumnae include high-profile feminists such as Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem. The French dubbing of *SATC* could thus be said to reflect a different ideological context, one in which female equality in education and employment were only supported by a small minority of French feminists who were considered extremely radical by their peers in the late nineteenth century (Ripa 1999: 81). As Harter observes, France and Continental Europe seem to have lagged significantly behind America where women's colleges had been multiplying since the middle of the nineteenth century and five thousand American women had been awarded a university degree by 1900 (Harter 2001: 46). In contrast, only six hundred French women had obtained the Baccalauréat in 1914 (Ripa 1999: 93). Arguments and resistances against women's equal access to education persisted until the 1920s and women's entry to university sometimes led to student riots and demonstrations (Hause and Kenney 1984: 124). Equal education for women was feared to compromise their physical attractiveness (Thébaud 1986: 293) and was deemed impossible as scientists had established that the weight and size of the female brain made women inapt to education (Bard 1999: 44)(Ripa 2002: 29). The idea that women's intellect was inferior to men's was even endorsed and broadcast by the influential Ligue Patriotique des Françaises: 'women doctors and lawyers are mediocre because a female intelligence only with extreme rarity measures up to a man's' (in Macknight 2007: 137). The ideological notion of feminine mediocrity in traditionally masculine fields appears to have persisted in the representation of professional women and seems to have informed the rewriting of female ambition and power in chick TTs.

### **2.2.3. Professional Ambition and Power**

In *SATC*, when high-powered Miranda 'had worked on a successful merger' (Episode 7 'The Monogamists' [11]), dubbed Miranda 'était débordée de travail'. The notion of success and responsibility disappears and is replaced by an overwhelming workload, presenting the image of a woman unable to cope with her job. In comparison, the subtitles render the importance of her task (Appendix 19 [11]). Other translational treatments of the phrase 'career girl' are insightful in this respect. The following example from *TDWP* is uttered by Andrea's mother when



Andrea arrives home for Thanksgiving after starting her first graduate job in New York:

ST:

Jay, the big New York City career girl is here, come say hi.

(Weisberger 2003: 76)

TT:

Jay! Notre New-Yorkaise est arrivée, viens lui dire bonjour.

(Weisberger 2004: 99)

In the ST, Andrea's mother attaches importance to her daughter's status as a big 'career girl' as well as to the culturally impressive city in which she lives. Although the motherly pride is maintained in the French, notably thanks to the possessive adjective *notre*, the shift from the article 'the' to *notre* as well as the omission of 'big' lessens the sense of admiration and lowers the pedestal on which Andrea's mother originally puts her daughter. Moreover, the notion of 'career girl' disappears entirely and the statement only draws attention to Andrea's place of residence. Another example from the French translation of *TDWP* suggests that Andrea's parents' attitude to her career and professional prospects might have been perceived as overenthusiastic. Here, Andrea and her father discuss her new job over a game of Scrabble:

ST:

'If you keep your eyes open and your priorities in order, you'll learn more in one year than most people in the industry will see in their entire careers.' He placed his first word in the middle of the board, JOLT.

'Not bad for an opening move,' I said and counted its worth [...] I added an A, M, and E to the L and accepted my paltry six points.

'I just want to make sure you give it a fair shake,' he said, switching his tiles around on his holder. 'The more I think about it, the more I'm convinced that this is going to be big things for you.'

'Well, I sure hope you're right, because I have enough paper cuts from wrapping to last a long, long time. There better be more to the whole thing than that.'

'There will be, sweetie, there will be. You'll see. It might feel like you're doing silly stuff, but trust me, you're not. This is the start of something fantastic, I can feel it. And I've studied your boss. This Miranda sounds like a tough woman, no doubt about it, but I think you're going to like her. And I think she's going to like you, too.'

He placed the word TOWEL down using my E and looked satisfied.

'I hope you're right, Dad. I really hope you're right.'

(Weisberger 2003: 81-82)

TT:

‘Si tu ouvres bien les yeux, et si tu gardes le cap sur tes priorités, tu apprendras davantage en un an que la plupart des gens de ce milieu dans toute leur carrière.’

‘J’espère que tu as raison, papa. Je l’espère sincèrement.’

(Weisberger 2004: 105)

In this example, over two hundred words were not translated into French. Andrea’s father’s advice that she should keep her mind and focus on the job is retained but the ensuing conversation is truncated, leading to the disappearance of two elements: Andrea’s father’s feelings and thoughts about his daughter’s professional trajectory and the Scrabble game as a background to their tête-à-tête. Although the reasons for this long omission are unclear, one is here reminded of the need voiced by editors of chick TTs to remove items considered not to bring anything to the main character, the story or the genre (see Chapter 3, section 4.1.3.). One could thus advance that the Scrabble game background may have appeared too unimportant to the development of both the plot and the heroine to be translated. As I have shown elsewhere, omissions of realist background details and the prioritisation of the plot are not uncommon practices in the French translations of bestselling novels (Feral 2006: 467-474). It could be argued, however, that this particular passage fulfils an essential function: it underlines Andrea’s parental support through her father’s faith in her professional abilities and prospects and provides a contrast between his optimistic kindness and her boss’s malevolent unpleasantness of which the reader has already had glimpses at this stage. The disappearance of most of the conversation between father and daughter could be said to have one important consequence on the characterisation of Andrea in the TT: she is a young woman who receives advice from her father but does not receive his support and encouragement. More importantly, she is no longer portrayed as a young woman whose father intimately believes is professionally destined for ‘big’, ‘better’ and ‘fantastic’ things.

The choice of an equivalent for the ‘career girl’ in the translation of *MM* presents an interesting case where, in the same way as *TDWP*, the notion of career in ‘career girl’ disappears. In the French, ‘career girl(s)’ (Green 1999: 188, 189, 197) becomes ‘femme(s) ambitieuse(s)’ (Green 2001: 188, 196) and thus follows *Collins-Robert* bilingual dictionary’s first suggestion cited in section 2.2.1.. In the translation of

*BJD*, one finds that this notion of female ambition emerges where the original conveys achievement:

ST:  
Natasha is a top family-law barrister.  
(Fielding 1998: 101)  
TT:  
C'est une avocate d'avenir.  
(Fielding 2002: 115)

While the ST defines Natasha as an accomplished professional at the top of her field, her status is lowered in the TT where she becomes a lawyer with promising prospects for the future. The idea that female careers are 'promising' rather than successful also appears elsewhere in the French translation of *BJD*: when Bridget finds herself 'surrounded by ex-career-girl mothers' (Fielding 1998: 69), French Bridget is 'au milieu d'une assemblée de mères ayant abandonné une carrière prometteuse' (Fielding 2002: 80). Women are thus portrayed as ambitious or with promising prospects to reach the top but not at the top itself. This exclusion from the top is also noticeable in the voice-over introduction of Samantha Jones in *SATC*. In English, she is introduced as a 'public relations executive'. In the French, this is simplified to 'Son métier: relation publique' (*SATC* Episode 1 'Sex and the City' [12]), changing Samantha's position as a managerial professional in public relations into one undefined job in this field. Such a simplification does not convey the decision-making nature of her position and the required qualities of control and authority. Her authority is turned into independence when the same Samantha sees it as adding to her sex-appeal:

ST:  
He usually dates models, but hey, I'm as good-looking as a model, plus I own my own business.  
TT:  
Il doit sûrement sortir avec des mannequins, mais moi aussi je suis bien roulée. En plus, je suis indépendante.  
  
(*SATC* Episode 1 'Sex and the City' [13])

If owning one's own business certainly implies independence, independence does not necessarily imply being the managing director of one's own company. This shift of

meaning is reminiscent of the independent working heroine of 1980s romances whose professional talent has to be very small. It also redefines Samantha as the negation of natural female dependence. In contrast, the subtitles retain Samantha's managerial position (Appendix 19 [13]). It is thus assumed that, in order to be intelligible to an average French viewer and reader, women's professional achievements and ambitions in chick texts need to be toned down and substituted by either independence or aspirations that are yet to be fulfilled.

It could be advanced that these transformations and omissions reflect the fact that, at the turn of the twenty-first century, French women are considered to be still 'working on it' (Burrell 2000: 83-92). Although female employment is now the norm and *la femme au foyer* is the exception (Bard 2004: 217) and although France has one of the highest female employment rates in Europe (Gregory 2000: 21), French women seem to lag behind their Anglo-American counterparts in their participation in upper-level jobs (Kremer 1999: 10). French employers are reluctant to give women positions that require a firm hand and authority (Holland 1997: 140) and women in higher administrative, academic and managerial posts continue to be greatly underrepresented (Laubier 1990: 113)(Holland 1997: 141)(Ripa 2002: 77). Not only have women in traditionally masculine fields and positions been portrayed negatively in the past but they are still not commonly visible in the present. If female employment has gained legitimacy in France, the French versions of chick texts seem to reveal how 'des milliers de petits détails, tous fondés sur le postulat qu'une femme au pouvoir, une femme qui commande, cela ne va pas de soi, ce n'est pas "naturel"' (Bourdieu in Portevin 1998) persist.

This persistence could be said to be due to the fact that unlike Britain, France does not seem to have ever had a popular model of female authority. Negative as they might be, the headmistress, matron and governess models (Freedman 1997: 162) provided British women with the opportunity to exercise their authority outside the family unit. It gave them a certain amount of professional credibility and an easier access to powerful positions. The British education system where 'responsibility in the running of the institution is considered a valuable part of training' (Hantrais 1982: 128) also produced another model of female authority which is absent from the

French system: the head girl (Freedman 1997: 162). Different histories produce different ideologies. Britain's long-standing tradition of politically powerful women from Elisabeth I to Margaret Thatcher undeniably shaped the nation's popular representation of women. The former prime minister in particular has been said to have 'played her part in the revolution and aspiration and thirst for power that propelled [a whole generation of British women] forward' (Wilkinson 1999: 47). In contrast, France has never had a female head of State. The absence of models of powerful and responsible female figures from French history is all the more noticeable in history schoolbooks where, compared to masculine figures, 'l'apparition des [rares] figures féminines [...] souffre constamment d'un déficit de sens révélant un processus de dévalorisation inconscient' (Rignault and Richert 1997: 43). Power, control and authority are therefore not taught as valuable – and therefore desirable – feminine qualities.

The idea that power is not feminine leads to a number of interesting shifts in meaning in the French translations of chick texts. When Bridget humorously reflects on her friends who have become 'power mothers' (Fielding 1998: 70), the notion of 'power' disappears and is replaced by arrogance: 'mères arrogantes' (Fielding 2002: 80). Power also disappears from the dubbing of the film *BJD* when Bridget's mother complains:

ST:  
I've got no power, no real career.  
TT:  
Je n'ai pas d'atout, pas de vrai métier.

(*BJD* [14])

Not only does the dubbing follow the aforementioned pattern of omitting the term 'career' but Bridget's mother's unhappiness at having no real control in her life is substituted by the idea that she has no assets. Whilst being powerful is likely to involve the possession of assets, possessing assets – of whatever form – does not necessarily lead to being powerful. One possible explanation in the light of the recurring patterns of transformation and deletion is that desiring assets may be more desirably feminine than desiring power.

The unacceptability of desiring professional power also appears obvious in the dubbing of Charlotte's words in *SATC*. Here, Charlotte anticipates the professional rewards of convincing a notoriously reclusive artist to exhibit his latest work at the gallery she runs:

ST:

So, if I could get him to show at the gallery, it would be an incredible coup.

TT:

Alors si j'arrive à lui obtenir une expo à la galerie ça serait un coup génial pour lui.

(*SATC* Episode 5 'The Power of Female Sex' [15])

In the dubbing, Charlotte does not bask in the glory of her potential professional 'coup'. Instead, she appears to anticipate how valuable the potential exhibition will be 'pour lui' which is neither the case in the original nor in the subtitles (Appendix 19 [15]). The dubbing is here reminiscent of the process of depreciation of female achievements noted above by Rignault and Richert. The emphasis on how valuable the exhibition will be to *his* career is also incoherent. Indeed, this painter is the one Charlotte learned all about in high school in the French dubbing. If he was so famous as to be on the high school curriculum, why would obtaining a gallery exhibition be 'un coup génial pour lui'? As the following section will show, the dubbing of *SATC* displays a distinct tendency to tone down not only female professional achievements but also female economic prospects and power.

#### 2.2.4. Economic Prospects and Power

Female economic prospects and power often manifest themselves in the form of potential or real estate and company ownership. The following conversation between Charlotte and Jack in the series *SATC* is a typical example of this:

ST:

Jack: What are your fantasies?

Charlotte: God, I'd love to own my own gallery.

TT:

Jack: Quels sont tes fantasmes?

Charlotte: J'en sais rien. J'adorerais avoir une galerie.

(*SATC* Episode 7 'Three's a Crowd' [16])

As the subtitles show (Appendix 19 [16]), it was linguistically and stylistically possible to convey Art Dealer Charlotte's wish to own *her own* art gallery. Although Charlotte is by far the least professionally ambitious character of the series, she still aspires to property and company ownership. In the French, Charlotte's words are humbler and could be said to reflect an ideological value associated with a prescribed Catholic humility. As Badinter explains,

dire de quelqu'un qu'il est ambitieux n'est pas vraiment un compliment!...Cette connotation négative remonte de très loin. Elle trouve notamment son origine dans le christianisme: Dieu vous a fait naître à telle place, vous devez donc vous y tenir. L'ambition est un défi lancé à Dieu. (in Busnel 2006a: 95)

Interestingly, the very mention of God is omitted in the French dubbing and its emphatic function is replaced by a marked vagueness from Charlotte which suggests that she does not know her own dreams. As the following example shows, this vagueness as regards one's dreams and goals seems to be typically female:

ST:

Mike: I'm a creative director of an ad agency but eventually I'd love to have my own shop.

Libby: I'd love to have my own shop, too. Well, cheese shop, I mean.

TT:

Mike: Je suis directeur de la créativité dans une agence mais je monterai sans doute un jour ma propre affaire.

Libby: En fait, je voudrais bien avoir une boutique. Une boutique de fromage, bien sûr.

(*SATC* Episode 6 'Secret Sex' [17])

The rendering of ownership ambitions seems to be based on the gender of the person who voices them. In the original, Libby and Mike use the same terms. They both would like to have their *own shop*. The French subtitles retain the same wording (Appendix 19 [17]) but in the dubbing, it disappears. Mike's ambition is transformed into an almost absolute certainty that he will, in the future tense, set up his own business one day. In comparison, Libby's ambition echoes Charlotte's in that she only would like, in the conditional, to have *a* generic shop. The chosen equivalents for 'shop' are equally interesting. In Mike's mouth, 'shop' becomes a serious *affaire* while in Libby's mouth, it becomes a *boutique*, in other words, a place associated with feminine leisure. Moreover, the addition of 'en fait' at the start of Libby's first

sentence as well as the omission of the adverb ‘too’ contributes to the sense that Libby only uttered these words as a vague afterthought rather than as an attempt to show Mike she had similar ambitions to his. Two interrelated reasons could be here advanced to explain this reluctance to convey feminine ambitions in the same manner as masculine ambitions. Firstly, as Pascale and Giles Gatineau (two dubbing authors of *SATC* and *AMB*) mentioned, the gender of a character often directly affects the way in which his or her lines are adapted into French:

Dans notre collaboration, ça nous arrive souvent de dire: ‘Tiens, toi, qui est un homme, qu’est-ce que tu dirais si t’étais un soldat?’ ‘Et bien [...] par un homme, ben tiens, on dirait plus ça, et par une femme...’. Il est évident que si on prend une phrase en anglais, si on la traduit basiquement, dite par un homme, dite par une femme, ça ne sera pas la même chose et si on arrive à trouver le petit mot qui fait la différence, qui reste dans le relief, c’est l’intérêt du métier. (05/04/2007)

This response suggests that working together helps the couple overcome a perceived hurdle related to a principle of gender differentiation: as men and women are believed to speak differently and use a different vocabulary, a dubbing team with both a man and a woman is more likely to make both male and female characters sound ‘right’. In situations where the original English sentence is the same, a dubbing author should ideally find the detail which will not only maintain but also accentuate gender differences. As previously explained, fixed gender differences have been an important poetological element of the romantic genre as well as an essential aspect of the dominant Republican and Catholic ideologies. This leads us to the second reason for the need to differentiate and subordinate a woman’s ambition to a man’s. If an individual’s ambition is a challenge to the place allotted by God, a woman’s ambition constitutes an even greater challenge for it threatens her allegedly natural position as a mother and wife. As a result ‘l’ambition féminine est, pour le sens commun, pire que pire’ (Badinter in Busnel 2006a: 96). This ‘worse than worse’ nature thus leads to a rewriting of female ambition in accordance with this ideological value.

Actual female property ownership seems to have been as problematic as prospective female ownership. In the following example from *BJD*, Sharon highlights single career women’s full buying power that stretches to home ownership:



ST:  
 a whole generation of single girls like me with their own incomes and homes.  
 (Fielding 1998: 42)  
 TT:  
 toute une génération de femmes célibataires, comme moi, qui gagnent leur vie, ont un appartement.  
 (Fielding 2002: 51)

In the French, the single women only seem to support themselves. They also have flats, not the more general English ‘homes’ that could include more prestigious forms of dwelling. Moreover, the generic ‘have’ of the French does not necessarily mean that they own their homes, unlike the original. Such simplifications echo the dubbed versions of Charlotte and Libby’s company ownership ambitions in *SATC*. Female property ownership is something the translator of *MLOP* also rectifies:

ST:  
 Single girls, I reflect, can afford to live in London’s green oases (in a box, in Tamsin’s case, but a very pretty one). When you’re reasonably well paid and fending only for yourself, a hefty mortgage is not the albatross.  
 (Knight 2000: 34)  
 TT:  
 J’ai noté que les filles célibataires peuvent se permettre d’habiter dans les vertes oasis de Londres (une simple boîte à chaussures, dans le cas de Tatiana, mais très chic). Si vous avez un salaire convenable, et que vous vivez seul, un loyer élevé n’est pas la mer à boire.  
 (Knight 2002: 42)

A mortgage becomes a *loyer*. When Tamsin worries about her future as a single mother ‘Stop working and not be able to pay the mortgage?’ (Knight 2000: 144), French Tatiana<sup>7</sup> has different worries: ‘Arrêter le boulot et ne plus pouvoir payer le loyer?’ (Knight 2002: 140). A female owner is thus rewritten into an independent female. Female economic power is also transformed outwith property ownership. When British Libby boasts of having ‘plenty of disposable income’ (Green 1999: 159) in *MM*, it is simplified into ‘un bon salaire’ (Green 2001: 160) in the French. In the following example, Libby looks back on earlier days when her earnings did not quite match her luxury tastes:

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<sup>7</sup> Her name was inexplicably changed.

ST:

Not that I could have afforded the lifestyle I wanted. Not then.

(Green 1999: 4)

TT:

Pas que je puisse m'offrir le train de vie que je souhaitais. Pas encore.

(Green 2001: 10)

Here, a change of tense and of time marker makes French Libby still unable to afford the lifestyle she aspired to. The economically achieving heroine is rewritten into an economically aspiring one. Female economic power seems to be toned down in the same manner as education, professional achievement and ambition.

Female power in the form of university qualifications, professional success and property ownership appears to have been consistently rewritten in chick TTs. Looking at the historical, socio-cultural and ideological context in which these versions have been produced, the manifestations of female power in original chick texts seem to have conflicted with a traditional model of femininity found in French romantic poetics and popular ideology: the lover and the mother whose place is in the private sphere. The comparative analysis reveals persisting French poetological and ideological values according to which women's presence in the public sphere is not desirable and their performance in politics, culture, business or higher education cannot be represented in the same way as men's. Bernard Henri-Lévy (BHL) and Françoise Giroud (FG)'s answers in an *Express International* interview on 'Les hommes, les femmes et l'amour' show how gender equality, in terms of access to and exercise of power in the public sphere, is perceived as detrimental to an ideal model of gender relations based on seduction and gender differences:

BHL: Je trouve les femmes de pouvoir plutôt moins désirable que les autres. Les hommes connaissent le pouvoir [...] si [une femme] est obsédée par le pouvoir, elle devient familière, trop semblable. Elle n'attire plus.

FG: Je crois que le pouvoir n'ajoute pas à la séduction d'une femme, franchement.

Interviewer: Mais il ajoute à celle d'un homme?

FG: Oui, c'est éclatant.

Interviewer: C'est terrible de dire cela! Une femme qui réussit tournerait le dos aux hommes?

FG: C'est plus compliqué que ça. Une comédienne ne perd pas de séduction en devenant star. C'est le pouvoir sur les personnes que les hommes supportent mal de voir assumé par une femme. En face d'une femme de pouvoir, l'homme est déstabilisé.

BHL: Les hommes [...] ne sont pas paniqués devant une femme d'autorité. Ils sont accablés de cette ressemblance, de ce mimétisme. (Henri-Lévy and Giroud in Remy 1993: 33)

An authoritative and powerful woman loses what seems to be at the core of her femininity: her ability to seduce. Ideologically, her role in society seems systematically defined in relation to a man (as his lover, wife and mother) or in opposition to him: the desirable woman cannot step out of these potential roles. In stepping into the roles that make a man dazzlingly attractive, the masculinised woman threatens or saddens. In either case, she is deemed unattractive. According to Giroud, mores have evolved and younger men 'ne se sentent plus diminués quand ils ont une femme intelligente qui travaille et gagne sa vie' (in Remy 1993: 33-34). This comment on the evolution of male attitudes towards female employment suggests that there is little difference, even in the mind of a staunch defender of the *condition féminine*, between a socio-culturally accepted feminine behaviour and a feminine behaviour accepted by men. Giroud's representation of the female partner who works and earns a living is also reminiscent of the figure of the independent woman and the 1980s working romantic heroine to whom I have referred in this chapter.

This echo between Giroud's comments made in the early 1990s and the previously mentioned archetype of the 1980s romantic heroine seems to point to an overlap between ideology and poetics, between socio-culturally acceptable and desirable manifestations of femininity and fictional representations of women. In the same way as men and society have grown to accept that women work outside the home, so working heroines have become more common in romantic texts. One is here strongly reminded of one of the social functions of romantic novels discussed in Chapter 2: to educate young women into heteronormative femininity via identification with the main characters. One could thus deduce that since the 1980s, employment, once considered to negate a woman's nature, no longer compromises one's femininity and ability to attract the opposite sex and is thus 'safe' to portray in romantic texts. If, as argued in Chapter 3, the *skopos* of chick TTs in France is to generate revenue by providing young women with entertaining romances, the translational strategies described so far suggest that, in order to present acceptable and desirable models of feminine behaviour to young females, some ideological revisions have been

necessary. The power enjoyed by some protagonists in the originals seems to have stretched slightly too far the limits of acceptability and desirability drawn by a previous representation of romantic heroines: a small professional talent allows the romance to conform to an ideal model of heterosexual relations based on asymmetrical power between the sexes. There are instances, however, when the limits have been crossed in the French versions of chick texts. Bearing in mind the notion of acceptability and desirability of the model provided by the romantic text and heroine, I shall now explore some noteworthy exceptions from the French translations of the books *SATC* and *TDWP*.

### **2.3. Exceptions**

The literary translations of *SATC* and *TDWP* could be said to present a number of exceptions to the patterns noted above. In these translations, the notion of female professional ambition, success and power can sometimes be rendered with astonishing care.

#### **2.3.1. Miranda Priestley in *The Devil Wears Prada***

Although, as I have shown, some passages of *TDWP* seem to conform to the aforementioned pattern of weakening and transforming women's professional drive and success, the following examples suggest that not all female characters' power and ambitions have been treated in the same way:

ST:

Miranda's transformation from Jewish peasant to secular socialite was complete. She rose quickly, ruthlessly, through the ranks of the magazine world.

(Weisberger 2003: 40)

TT:

La petite prolétaire juive était devenue une mondaine séculaire. La transformation était achevée et Miranda avait commencé son ascension fulgurante, impitoyable, dans le monde de la presse.

(Weisberger 2004: 59)

ST:

the most important woman at the most profitable magazine at the biggest magazine publishing company in the entire world.

(Weisberger 2003: 81)

TT:

la femme la plus influente du magazine le plus rentable du plus puissant groupe de presse du monde.  
(Weisberger 2004: 105)

ST:  
Miranda Priestly really was someone important, someone worth bending rules and suspending logic for.  
(Weisberger 2003: 83)

TT:  
Miranda Priestly était un personnage important, quelqu'un qui méritait que l'on fasse des entorses aux règlements et à la logique.  
(Weisberger 2004: 105)

In these translations, 'son ascension fulgurante, impitoyable', 'la femme la plus influente du magazine le plus rentable du plus puissant groupe', 'un personnage important' all render the notion of female power in the public sphere and thus appear to depart from the formerly discussed translational strategies. While this could be taken as a sign that poetics may be changing via some occasional lapses in the translational and editorial approach to chick texts, the examples above display one commonality which could explain this discrepancy. These examples do not concern the heroine of *TDWP*, Andrea, but the anti-heroine of the novel: Miranda Priestley, the fictional fashion magazine *Runway*'s editor-in-chief and Andrea's boss. Miranda is unlikely to elicit identification from the readership: she is considerably older than Andrea, she is married with two children and more importantly, she is consistently portrayed as a callous and despicable woman who alienates and humiliates her employees. Miranda is the Devil who wears Prada. I would like to suggest that these characteristics have enabled the representation of female power and importance to remain intact in translation. Indeed, as conflicts between honest Andrea and evil Miranda drive the narrative, retaining Miranda's power in the public sphere seems here to contribute to her characterisation as an obnoxious boss and maintains the moral dichotomy. If Miranda's career-drive and authority fit in with the odiousness of her character, not all references to her as a powerful and important individual are rendered as literally as the examples above. Here, for instance, Andrea refers to the restaurant staff from whom she orders her superior's breakfast daily:

ST:  
They were deliciously unaffiliated with *Runway*, even though their separate existences in my life were solely meant to make its editor's life more

perfect. Not a single one of them truly understood Miranda's power and prestige. Breakfast number one would be on its way to 640 Madison in seconds.

(Weisberger 2003: 145)

TT:

De plus, ils n'étaient pas directement affiliés à *Runway*, même s'ils n'étaient entrés dans ma vie que pour amener à son ultime degré de perfection la vie de sa rédactrice en chef. Le petit déjeuner n° 1 serait en route d'ici quelques secondes.

(Weisberger 2004: 175)

Although the French translation specifies Miranda's position of editor as editor-in-chief (a fact which, by this stage, ought to be known by the reader), the restaurant staff's ignorance of Miranda's power and prestige disappears and thus her boss's power and prestige themselves are missing from the French translation. It seems, then, that not even a distasteful character such as Miranda Priestly is exempt from the translational strategy which removes or attenuates female authority and power. The translation of *SATC* presents an interesting parallel to the case of Miranda Priestly in *TDWP*.

### 2.3.2. The Novel *Sex and the City*

In the French translation of the novel *SATC*, 'successful' (Bushnell 1996: 4, 25, 40) when applied to a female character becomes 'ayant fait carrière' (Bushnell 2003: 14), 'brillante' (Bushnell 2003: 41), 'qui a fait carrière' (Bushnell 2003: 61). The translator of *SATC* does not seem to shy away from the word 'career' even though when the term appears twice, two careers appears to be one too many:

ST:

You were such an innocent, sweetpea. But then, you've always had a career. Even if you were starving, you've had a career.

(Bushnell 1996: 54)

TT:

T'as toujours été une pure, mon cœur. Mais t'as toujours eu ton travail, toi. Même si tu as parfois mangé de la vache enragée, tu as ta carrière.

(Bushnell 2003: 78)

The following examples also show that the translation of the adjective 'successful' (as an expected characteristic in a potential partner) also depends on the gender of the individual:

ST:

'I narrowed it down to three qualities' Trudie said 'Smart, successful, and sweet'.

(Bushnell 1996: 154)

TT:

J'ai réduit mes exigences à trois, dit Trudie. Intelligent, gentil, carrière solide.

(Bushnell 2003: 198)

ST:

when he [Capote Duncan] does, it will be with a woman who's beautiful, smart and successful.

(Bushnell 1996: 4)

TT:

quand son tour viendra, il choisira une femme belle, intelligente et qui aura fait carrière de surcroît.

(Bushnell 2003: 13)

In the French, Trudie's potential husband's career is taken for granted and all she expects is for this career to be 'solide'. In contrast, in the second example, Capote Duncan's potential partner's career is an added bonus 'de surcroît'. A career emerges as additional rather than integral to a woman's identity. A woman's career is also not perceived altogether positively, especially from a potential sexual partner's point of view:

ST:

It's easier to get a model into bed than it is to get a civilian [a non-model] with a career to put out.

(Bushnell 1996: 37)

TT:

C'est plus facile de coucher avec une mannequin qu'avec une civile, qui va te rebattre les oreilles de sa carrière.

(Bushnell 2003: 56)

Whereas a 'civilian's determination to pursue a career was the main obstacle to getting her 'into bed', the deterrent in the French appears to be the boring nature of a career-minded woman's conversation.

Like the French translation of *TDWP*, the translation of the novel *SATC* therefore displays an interesting combination of translational strategies. Some appear to follow the previously discussed tendency to convey a woman's career as either supplementary or undesirable from a male point of view. Others could be said to

depict female professional success integrally. One reason could be advanced for this lack of coherence in translational strategies. Amongst the titles under study here, the book *SATC* is the only text whose *skopos* does not exactly conform to the appellative entertaining romance profile outlined in Chapter 3. Indeed, it seems that at the initiating stage, the primary function of the translation of *SATC* was perceived as informative rather than appellative. As shown in Chapter 3, several factors account for this. Although *SATC* is a novel, it is considered to be a collection of journalistic articles rather than a fiction. There is no romantic element and the narrative focuses on conversations and debates amongst New Yorkers about their own sexual mores and habits. As I have shown in Chapter 3 (sections 3.2. and 4.2.3.) *SATC* has been defined as a sinister and serious book in France and its French editor defines it as a *reportage*, i.e. an informative chronicle about a society that clearly holds different values and beliefs. Although the women in the novel *SATC* are not economically or professionally more powerful than other chick heroines, female characters seem to have partially retained their professional power in the French translation because they have been perceived as protagonists featuring in a documentary on a society which, as the review announces on the back cover, is ‘falling apart’. They have not been interpreted as romantic heroines and thus do not need to be redefined according to a pre-existing fictional model. Consequently, the *skopos* of the translation requires the mores and values represented in the text to be – at least partially – incoherent with its recipients’ dominant ideological representation of desirable femininity and poetological model of romantic heroine.

The exceptions of this section show that a fictional woman’s power in the public sphere seems more likely to be rendered literally if her function is not to provide a model of desirable femininity. In this respect, the exceptions discussed here could be said to contribute to the overall effect of the aforementioned pattern of weakening and transforming female power. As this power is held by a female villain or female representatives of a troubled society, these exceptions reinforce the notion that being powerful in the public sphere is not desirably feminine.



### 3. Conclusion

Representations of women, even entertaining fictional ones, do not exist in a vacuum. If one of the social functions of romantic texts is indeed to provide young females with acceptable and desirable models of femininity, the translational patterns found in chick TTs suggest that some characteristics displayed by heroines are incompatible with the translators' own notions of acceptable and desirable femininity. French women may have legally acquired equality but the French translations of chick texts indicate that the struggle by which this theoretical equality has been achieved tends to be surrounded by silence. By avoiding direct references to feminism and feminist arguments, chick TTs show the extent to which 'feminism is a repressed ideology' (Cross 1997: 165) and perpetuate the 'profound ignorance of the specificity and endurance of the [feminist] struggle in France' (Cross 1997: 164). A great number of French women may now work outside the home and may be represented as such in the fictional world but chick TTs tend to show that the figure of the powerful and career-driven female remains problematically antonymous to the prevailing representation of desirable femininity. As BHL's words indicate, this femininity cannot display too many masculine characteristics and must maintain its alterity in order to remain desirable.

If a woman's work and independence have not been perceived as emasculating since the 1980s, the romantic working heroine, who stopped working upon marrying, did not challenge the idea that women were primarily mothers and homemakers. By ensuring that the top of her field remained exclusively male, her insignificant professional talent and power did not disturb the dominant patriarchal ideology. The translators' marked tendency to revert to this two-decade-old fictional portrayal of working women points to an 'inertie des mœurs' (Ripa 2002: 54) and reveals that representations of female professional and economic power beyond inconsequential aspiration and self-support are still problematic at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Claiming a French 'persistance chez beaucoup de l'idée que la place "naturelle" des femmes est à la maison' (Ripa 2002: 64) could be seen as overly radical. Yet, the fact that female employment has greatly increased and legal equality has been achieved

in recent years does not mean that centuries of institutionalised exclusion of women from professional, economical and political power have left no mark on the collective unconscious and French language. As my comparative analysis reveals, the belief that women's place is in the home 'a survécu, travestie' (Ripa 2002: 40) and has now become a 'non-dit' (Ripa 2002: 41) which only becomes visible when confronted by a different model of femininity, one informed by the Anglo-American feminist emphasis on women's equal rights and power. The glimpses of Anglo-American feminism in chick texts seem to have been met with an anti-feminist resistance akin to 'defensive masculinity' (Castelain-Meunier 1988: 69). As Castelain-Meunier observes, the strength of defensive masculinists lies in 'dire tout haut ce que les autres pensent tout bas' about feminists and professional women: these women are unattractive and their unnatural will to succeed has caused social disorder (Castelain-Meunier 1988: 69-71). The empowerment of women in the public sphere raises anxieties about the eroding of 'natural' differences between the sexes, central to the libertine tradition of seduction: empowered women will lose their attractiveness and disempower men (Ezekiel 2002: 351). The French culture of seduction therefore appears to effectively conceal and maintain patriarchal structures and gender inequality. As the only female prime minister in France observes, there is a

misogynie [which] se cache derrière la galanterie des hommes qui jouent au jeu de la séduction avec les femmes. [...] La France est un pays à forte tradition, je dirais, d'une misogynie dissimulée, qui n'apparaît pas, qui ne s'avoue pas mais qui éclate dès qu'il y a des questions de pouvoir. (Cresson in Freedman 1997: 268-270)

While misogyny may no longer be openly practised in the twenty-first century, one can still sense a persisting anti-feminist ideology behind a number of reactions to Ségolène Royal's presidential candidacy and campaign. Royal was reminded (by members of her own party) that the presidential election was not a beauty contest, she was asked who would look after her children (Poyetton 2007: 3) and was told to go back to her recipe books (Bertini in Pralong 2007: 17). Her competence was constantly called into question (Poyetton 2007a: 12) and media sociologists noted an 'impensé journalistique' as regards the candidate: after a speech or a debate, journalists would elaborate on the 'Ségolène style' but were seemingly unable to

recollect the content of Royal's most explicitly formulated political propositions (Bertini 2007: 17). This phenomenon of *démémorisation* was equally observed in male and female viewers (Ibid.). In Bertini's words,

comment expliquer une telle absence, un tel blanc, autrement que par les résistances si fortes qui continuent de s'opérer dans notre esprit, y compris à notre corps défendant, à l'encontre de l'idée de l'accession des femmes à toutes les formes de pouvoir, autres que celles qui relèvent de leur espace traditionnel: l'univers domestique et la séduction? (in Pralong 2007: 17)

These unconscious resistances evoked by Bertini here appear to have been at play in the translations of explicit signs of female access to and exercise of power in the French versions of chick texts.

The difference in treatment of female professional and economic power between texts translated for the entertainment of a wide public (dubbing) and texts translated for a cultured and intellectual minority (subtitles) also points to a paradoxical situation: the philosophically sophisticated French feminism as known in Anglo-American academic circles in the 1990s does not seem to have filtered down to the wider public. This feminism could not be defined as a feminist movement and displays little inclination to cultivate a broader movement of female solidarity (Cross 1997: 172-174). Its debates appear to be part of an inward-looking, limited, academic phenomenon 'nurtured further by feminist academics on an international network, in particular those from American universities' (Cross 1997: 175). As Cross points out, 'any organised political action stemming from this theoretical aspect of feminist ideology has been virtually negligible' (Cross 1997: 174). This would explain why even the subtlest feminist alternatives to patriarchal notions of feminine roles have been omitted, attenuated, modified – in other words rewritten – in chick TTs. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, female power in the public sphere is not the only aspect of chick femininity which has undergone poetological and ideological revision: certain aspects of chick femininity in the private sphere seem to have also needed to be rewritten.

## Chapter Five

### The Rewriting of Femininity in the Private Sphere

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter examines the representation of certain aspects of femininity in the private sphere in a number of chick TTs. The corpus analysed is essentially the same as Chapter 4 with two exceptions: the film *BJD* and the novel *TDWP*. Although these two texts' subversive representations of women in the public sphere are relatively consistent with the other texts under analysis, an examination of their thematic content has uncovered little subversiveness in their representation of women in the private sphere. As the least subversive text of this study, the film *BJD* does not seem to address women's relationship to men, female beauty and sexuality in a majorly new or progressive way. As Whelehan notes, the sharpness of Bridget's socio-cultural observations and her friend Sharon's feminism are two of the numerous features which disappeared in the process of adaptation from the page to the screen (2002: 75-77). In the case of *TDWP*, the narrative focus on the heroine's professional life means that femininity in the private sphere and notably in intimate and sexual relationships is barely touched upon. This chapter's focus on women in the private sphere has led to a circumstantial emphasis on texts which explore this theme at length: the novel *SATC* and its televisual adaptation. As will become evident, the dubbed version of *SATC* presents the greatest number of adaptive and rewriting strategies. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, as established in Chapter 3 (section 2.3.), dubbing tends to be the most ideologically conservative audiovisual translation method. Secondly, as demonstrated in Chapter 1 (section 3.3.), the series *SATC*'s content has been ideologically controversial in Anglo-American cultures. Thirdly, *SATC* is a text for which censorship has been particularly strong when broadcast in America but on a different channel (Chiaro 2007: 257-260), when subtitled in Spanish (Scandura 2004) or dubbed in Italian (Chiaro 2007). However,

as this chapter will demonstrate, the French dubbing of *SATC* is not an exceptional case, but perhaps constitutes the most extreme example of the way in which subversive representations of femininity undergo a process of poetological and ideological revision from English into French.

As Chapter 1 (section 4.3.2.) has demonstrated, the ‘Male Other’ in chick texts is constructed through the eyes of a contemptuous and anxious female narrator who consciously or unconsciously rejects the patriarchal myth of ‘natural’ female acceptance in the private sphere of personal relationships. The first section thus looks at the French translational treatment of unflattering representations of male characters and other elements reflective of the impact of feminism on socio-cultural attitudes, notably the perceived ‘war of the sexes’. As chick texts have been argued as offering a resistance to female beauty canons, the second section turns to the French rendering of issues surrounding female body image and more particularly heroines’ awareness of the patriarchal construct of feminine beauty. As the representation of female sexuality has been one of the most debated elements of chick texts, the following six sections explore the translational strategies employed as regards women’s sexual behaviour and identity. The first three sections are organised around recurrent patterns that emerged from the comparative analysis: the image of the courtesan which seems to permeate the representation of women’s sexuality; the dichotomy of prudery and depravation to which chick TTs seem to resort in order to articulate precise ideas about female sexual morals; and the normative frame of romance in which female sexual expression seems to be relocated. The last three sections examine the French rendering of three interconnected elements subverting patriarchal notions of female sexuality: sexually masculine women, female sexual agency and female sexual pleasure. Like Chapter 4, the number between square brackets for each audiovisual example refers to the subtitled target text provided in Appendix 20.

## 2. Comparative Analysis

### 2.1. The War of the Sexes

As the previous chapter (section 2.1.) has shown, allusions to feminism, particularly in the form of references to feminist names and figures, tend to be diluted in chick TTs. The following example constitutes an insightful exception to this tendency and illustrates in what respect the concept of feminism can emerge in a chick TT even when the ST makes no mention of it. In this passage, the four heroines of the series *SATC* discuss the advantages of performing fellatio on a man:

ST:

Samantha: Plus the sense of power is such a turn on, maybe you're on your knees, but you've got him by the balls.

Charlotte: Now, you see, that is the reason I don't want to go down this road.

TT:

Samantha: Et en plus, tu as un pouvoir sur eux très excitant. Tu es peut-être à genoux mais tu les tiens par les couilles.

Charlotte: Je ne suis pas féministe et je n'ai aucune envie de faire ce que vous dites, aucune!

(*SATC* Episode 7 'The monogamists' [1])

Although both the ST and the TT convey that Charlotte does not wish to put herself in a position where she feels that she has power over a man's genitals, her rejection seems stronger and more absolute in the French aided by 'aucune envie' and the repetition of 'aucune'. Moreover, French Charlotte adds a reason: she is not a feminist, conflating the practice of fellatio as described by Samantha and feminist empowerment. This striking departure from the original could perhaps be explained by the shift from third masculine singular 'him' to third masculine plural 'eux' and 'les' in Samantha's line. Indeed, it could be argued that original Samantha defines the 'sense of power' solely in terms of sexual arousal within intercourse with one individual male partner while French Samantha's words simplify this to 'un pouvoir' over several men. The incongruous addition of Charlotte's disavowal of feminism in this context could also be understood in relation to a common criticism made about the women's movement in France: its 'agressivité castratrice' (Bard 1999: 305). The idea of emasculation as one of feminism's main objectives (Bard 1999:

305)(Castelain-Meunier 1988: 69) is particularly present in French accounts of the American women's movement, a Franco-French trend which Ezekiel calls *anti-amér-féminisme* (Ezekiel 2002). *Anti-amér-féminisme* has been particularly effective in repelling French women and feminists from the 'dangers' of Anglo-American style feminism (Ezekiel 2002: 346) such as its 'war of the sexes' (Cross 1997: 165)(Ezekiel 2002: 351) which has reportedly made American men impotent and America itself the least sexually satisfied country in the West (Ibid.). Central to *anti-amér-féministe* discourse is 'the defense of seduction *à la française* and of the supposedly harmonious relationships between the sexes' (Ibid.). Indeed, the French – including academics, intellectuals and feminists – have a tendency to present their culture as a heterosexual heaven (Holland 1997: 145)(Nye 1999: 105) which they oppose to overly puritan and hostile gender relations in Anglo-American cultures (Ozouf 1995: 395)(Bozon 2001: 255-256).

As chick TTs aim to entertain young women and provide them with desirable models of heterosexuality, the negative representations of gender relations in general and male protagonists in particular seem to have required moderation. While the most commonly deplored male inadequacies are self-centredness, dishonesty, despotism, promiscuity and infidelity in chick STs (Smyczynska 2004: 31), chick TTs tend to attenuate such flaws. In a list which Bridget draws to determine the different types of men she ought to avoid in the future, 'emotional fuckwits' (Fielding 1998: 2) turn into inconsequential 'bavards impénitents' (Fielding 2002: 7) while 'chauvinists' (Fielding 1998: 2) disappear altogether. Similarly, when Clara refers to her friend's unfaithful husband in *MLOP*, 'her shit of a leech of a husband' (Knight 2000: 88) becomes 'son crétin de mari' (Knight 2002: 88) and 'philandering bastard' (Knight 2000: 93) turns into 'don Juan à la manque' (Knight 2002: 93). When Bridget's mother dismisses a 'stupid *man*' (Fielding 1998: 182), she only dismisses 'un *homme*' in the French (Fielding, 2002: 202) while her 'pompous, dissolute old *fart*' (Fielding 1998: 182) becomes an 'imbecile arrogant et débauché' (Fielding 2002: 203). A particularly unpleasant male character's 'incredibly assumptive, patronising' (Fielding 1998: 126) attitude is weakened into an 'incroyable culot' (Fielding 2002: 140). Narrators and protagonists in chick TTs seem less inclined to appear overly

aggressive and critical in their description of men. This is particularly evident in the following example from *SATC* where an interviewed model bemoans men's attitude towards beautiful women:

ST:

There are two types of guys that fall for beautiful women, either they're slimeballs who're just out to get laid or they fall in love with you instantly, it's pathetic.

TT:

Il y a deux types de mecs qui sont sensibles aux femmes, les uns nous prennent pour des objets sexuels tandis que les autres tombent amoureux de nous, juste pour une nuit.

(*SATC* Episode 2 'Models and Mortals' [2])

Both the notion of male slimeballs and that of general male 'patheticness' have disappeared from the French dubbing. Interestingly, male casual promiscuity is also shown in a less negative light: women are taken for 'sexual objects' not only by the first type of men but also by the second type of men who seem to fall in love with them for the total duration of a one night stand. The way in which the harsh treatment of men has been moderated in chick TTs appears to indicate not only a greater tolerance towards male behaviour but also a need to protect 'harmonious Gallic male-female relations [from] the violent, American-style War of the Sexes, with its armies of ageing lesbian hags' (Ezekiel 2002: 352-353). Glimpses of the impact of Anglo-American feminism on gender relations thus tend to be removed or attenuated, presenting the heroines and other female characters in a more man-friendly light. The idea of 'the sexes', for instance, disappears from the French translation of *BJD*:

ST:

How can it be that the situation between the sexes after a first night remains so agonizingly imbalanced?

(Fielding 1998: 60)

TT:

Comment se peut-il que la situation après une première nuit soit toujours aussi atrocement déséquilibrée?

(Fielding 2002: 70)



Here, Bridget refers to what sociologists call the ‘asymmetry of emotion work’ between men and women which is considered to be a factor of gender inequality (Duncombe and Marsden 1993, 1995). As Bridget observes, this asymmetry is established as soon as a romantic and sexual bond is formed. The verb ‘remains’ in particular seems to convey a sense of frustration at a problem which ought to have been resolved and yet still occurs. While there is also a great imbalance in the French, the omission of ‘between the sexes’ means that its nature is unspecified and the reader is not invited to understand it in terms of gender hierarchy. Moreover, in the absence of such a specification, the choice of ‘soit toujours’ to translate ‘remains’ could also mean ‘is always’, thus attributing an atemporal quality to the situation rather than an exasperatingly persisting one. Similar subtle transformations occur in the following example from *SATC*:

ST:

Samantha: Sweetheart, men give, women receive. It’s biological destiny.

Miranda: Hello? Do you really wanna be saying that? I mean, that’s exactly the kind of argument men have been using since the dawn of time to exploit women. I mean, I don’t...

TT:

Samantha: Mon cœur, les hommes donnent, les femmes reçoivent. C’est un processus biologique.

Miranda: T’es dingue ou quoi? C’est une honte de dire ça! Parce que c’est tout à fait le genre d’argument que les hommes utilisent depuis la nuit des temps. Tu ne vas pas commencer à parler comme eux!

(*SATC* Episode 5 ‘The Power of Female Sex’ [3])

The questioning of female ‘biological destiny’ or *destin biologique* initiated by Simone de Beauvoir in *Le deuxième sexe* was instrumental in exposing femininity as a patriarchal and oppressive construct in Second Wave Feminism. Samantha’s use of the concept in order to deproblematiser women’s material dependence on men is therefore highly controversial and, in the light of Miranda’s response, likely to be deliberately provocative. While the subtitles reuse de Beauvoir’s *destin biologique* (Appendix 20 [3]), the shift from ‘destiny’ to ‘processus’ in the dubbed version misses the reference, suggesting that the average French viewer is considered less likely to recognise and understand it than his or her cultured and intellectual counterpart. To an extent, the choice of *processus* over *destin* could also be said to

intensify Samantha's determinism: one is more likely to question the fatalism of *destin* than a process pertaining to biology. Miranda's reaction to Samantha's controversial argument has also undergone a few transformations. Although Miranda's indignation is stronger in the French (she finds Samantha crazy and her words shameful), the reason for her outrage is ambiguous. French Miranda does point to Samantha's argument as being one historically used by men but men's exploitation of women has disappeared. If she is indeed appalled at Samantha's determinist condoning of sexual exploitation, it is simply not as clear as in the original. One reason for this omission (which does not occur in the subtitles) could stem from the aforementioned *anti-amér-féminisme* which is uncomfortable with Anglo-American feminism's portrayal of 'a female environment [...] under siege' (2002: 353). The idea of men as oppressors does not seem to fit in with the previously mentioned 'special gentleness and complicity' believed to exist between the sexes in France (Holland 1997: 148). Moreover, mainstream concern with sexism and women's oppression tend to be displaced to former colonies and other states (Ibid.) as though gender equality had been achieved in France itself. The last significant transformation in the TT is an incongruous addition which, in the absence of male exploitation of women, could provide an alternative interpretation as regards Miranda's anger. While original Miranda is interrupted in mid-sentence and her 'I mean, I don't...' could lead to the development of her point, French Miranda admonishes Samantha for talking like men as though this were the real offence. All in all, the TT seems to have sufficiently changed the terms of the debate so as to strengthen the view of gender relations as naturally rather than historically exploitative.

A similar ambiguity emerges in the following example from *BJD* when Sharon voices her discontent with men:

ST:  
 Bastards!...Stupid, smug, arrogant, manipulative, self-indulgent bastards!  
 They exist in a total Culture of Entitlement.  
 (Fielding 1998: 125)  
 TT:  
 Ordures! Stupides salauds, prétentieux, arrogants, pervers! Rejetons d'une civilisation de machos!

Here, both ‘ordures’ and ‘salauds’ could be seen as effective translations of the repeated insult ‘bastards’. Interestingly, ‘manipulative’ and ‘self-indulgent’ are replaced by a single adjective ‘pervers’ thus covering both ‘exercising unscrupulous control over a person’ and ‘tending to do exactly what one wants, especially if this involves pleasure or idleness’ (*OED*). The use of *pervers* excludes certain meanings implied by the original and includes new ones at the same time. Its general meaning ‘enclin au mal; qui fait, qui aime à faire le mal’ as well as its general use in psychology ‘totalement dépourvu de sentiments et de sens moral’ (*TLFi*) could be seen to convey the lack of scruples demonstrated by a manipulative man. However, it fails to express the notion of male self-indulgence unless this self-indulgence is understood in sexual terms. Indeed, in the context of male sexuality, *pervers* means ‘dont le comportement sexuel s’écarte de la normalité’ (*TLFi*). The most striking departure from the original concerns the second sentence. Here, Sharon deplores male behaviour by defining it as a symptom of patriarchy in which men feel culturally entitled to do as they please. The concept of ‘Culture of Entitlement’ (or culture of male entitlement) is commonly used in feminist analysis to expose men’s unchallenged sense of power over women, particularly – but not exclusively – in situations of sexual and domestic violence. This feminist terminology is replaced by a complaint that men are the offspring of a ‘civilisation de machos’, lessening the sense of male responsibility implied by the active voice ‘they exist’ and the emphatic adjective ‘total’. A comparison of the English and French definitions of the noun ‘macho’ sheds further light on the implications of the translation. In English, a macho is defined as ‘a man who is aggressively proud of his masculinity’ (*OED*) whereas in French, he is a man who has ‘une conscience exacerbée de sa supériorité virile, et qui prône la suprématie du mâle’ (*TLFi*). What is perceived as aggressive pride in one’s gender in English is understood as heightened consciousness of the superiority in one’s gender and the advocacy of its supremacy in French. The English definition does not address whether the aggressively proud attitude displayed by a macho is justified. In comparison, the French states that a macho advocates male supremacy because he is overly aware of his virile superiority, thus leaving unquestioned the notion that this superiority is real. Moreover, as Castelain-Meunier

points out, the figure of the macho in France has come to be viewed in humorous terms (Castelain-Meunier 2004), he is now associated with a caveman and a *beauf*: the ‘average’ working-class and uneducated Frenchman often mocked for his limited cultural capital (cheap beer, camping holidays and unattractive sportswear). If the concept of *machisme* (machismo) can indeed be used as a means to articulate women’s oppression in French, the noun *macho* itself does not possess the academic and feminist connotation conveyed by the original ‘Culture of Entitlement’. Moreover, the definition of *machisme* ‘idéologie héritée de la civilisation ibérique et plus spécialement ibéro-américaine qui prône la suprématie du mâle’ (*TLFi*) presents this ideology in relation to men and does not address how it may be detrimental to women.

This reluctance to address male perpetrated oppression of women is particularly relevant when looking at the translation of *BJD* where a ‘disgusting sexist drunk’ (Fielding 1998: 128) turns into a ‘macho ivrogne’ (Fielding 1998: 143). The disappearance of ‘disgusting’ weakens the sense of repugnance while the substitution of ‘sexist’ by ‘macho’ lessens the idea of male hostility towards women. In English, a sexist is someone who practices sexism, i.e. ‘prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination, typically against women, on the basis of sex’ (*OED*). This generic and concise definition can be contrasted to that of *sexisme*:

*Péjoratif* [généralement dans le langage des féministes] Attitude discriminatoire adoptée à l’encontre du sexe opposé (principalement par les hommes qui s’attribuent le meilleur rôle dans le couple et la société aux dépens des femmes reléguées au second plan, exploitées comme objet de plaisir, etc.). (*TLFi*)

Interestingly, the range of sexist offences seems to be narrower in French: sexism is a discriminatory attitude in which men give themselves the best role. Prejudice and stereotyping, which come first in the English definition, do not figure. What is more, if the attitude is generally understood à l’encontre the opposite sex, it is not explicitly defined as *against* women but at the expense of women who are relegated to a secondary position and thus exploited as sexual objects. The passive voice is here significant especially when compared to the active voice used to convey how men choose the best role in relationships and society. If men *do* sexism, sexism merely seems to happen to women. Furthermore, the ‘etc.’ puts an abrupt end to a

particularly short list of examples of women's inferior social status. In the light of the English definition, the length of the French explanation as well as the specification of pejorative and feminist use raises an important issue: while the concept appears common in English, it seems more specific and negatively associated to the women's movement in French. The choice of 'macho' over *sexiste* avoids the feminist specificity and in doing so reflects and reinforces the undesirability of portraying gender relations as a site where men actively oppress women.

The previously discussed notion of male entitlement is made somewhat clearer in another example from *BJD*:

ST:

'Culture of Entitlement' growled Sharon. 'Cooking, succour, beautiful young girls' bodies when they're old and fat. Think women are there to give them what they're bloody entitled...

(Fielding 1998: 127)

TT:

Civilisation de machos qui se croient tout permis! a repris Sharon. Il faut leur faire la cuisine, les réconforter...et quand on devient vieille et grosse, ils nous échangent contre une beauté de vingt ans! Comme si tout ça leur était dû...

(Fielding 2002: 142)

In the TT, men's faults are indeed to believe that they are allowed to behave as they please and that women's devotion is owed to them. However, two elements have changed from English into French. Firstly, Sharon's growling tone disappears: she merely continues and no equivalent has been sought to render her angry 'bloody'. Secondly, the female devotion depicted in the French differs from that of the original. In the ST, Sharon exposes the paradox of men's assumptive expectations: being domestically cared for and sexually involved with attractive young women despite being 'old and fat' themselves. In the French, however, this list starts with what *must* be done for men and ends with the likely fate of the women who have domestically cared for men but have become old and fat: they will be replaced by a twenty-year-old beauty. Thus, French Sharon does not entirely dismiss men's general entitlements (being cooked for and comforted) but deplores the unfairness of dutifully giving a man what he is entitled, only to get traded in for a younger model.

The condemnation therefore shifts from men expecting a particular behaviour from women to men being ungrateful for women's expected behaviour.

Chick TTs seem to display a reluctance to portray female characters as excessively critical of men's behaviour and as influenced by a degree of feminist understanding of gender relations. If, via terms such as *macho*, the translations do address the idea of male domination, the resulting oppression of women remains more elusive. The explicit hostility between the sexes as depicted in the originals may have posed a threat to the 'dominant heterosociality' (Ezekiel 2002: 351) in France, yet the war of the sexes – or the image of feminists pitted against men – seems to have informed a number of transformations and omissions in the French versions. As Ripa explains, the popular view of feminism as inherently against the male population is based on the opposition of

deux camps: celui des féministes, formé uniquement de femmes, sans les inclure ni les représenter toutes, et celui des hommes; l'absence de qualification de ceux-ci les renvoie à leur nature biologique (le sexe masculin), à une catégorie homogène (tous les hommes sans distinction), voire à un état d'innocence puisque l'idée reçue ne s'interroge pas sur la proposition inverse: on ne saura pas si les hommes, ou des hommes, sont contre les femmes. D'emblée, les féministes sont présentées comme les ennemies de la gent masculine; dans cette guerre des sexes, elles sont les agresseuses, ils sont les agressés. (Ripa 2002: 107)

The French rejection of the war of the sexes is thus accompanied by an implicit bias: in this war waged by feminists, men are innocent victims, not the perpetrators. Although men's innocence is never claimed as such in chick TTs, their responsibility in maintaining oppressive patriarchal structures is never explicitly addressed. Contemptuous chick characters are therefore rewritten into more tolerant heroines with a more limited awareness of arguments concerning gender inequality in the private sphere. From a French point of view, chick protagonists may have displayed an understanding of men commonly associated with emasculating feminism and thus are at odds with the dominant poetological and ideological models of the romantic heroine and the desirable woman. As the following section will show, poetics and ideology seem to have created similar patterns in the translational rendering of female characters' questioning of beauty canons.

## 2.2. Beauty

This section examines how translators and dubbing authors have dealt with the idea of feminine beauty as an oppressive construct. Heroines demonstrate a degree of familiarity with the patriarchal nature of what Naomi Wolf calls the ‘Beauty Myth’ and voice their dissatisfaction with the way in which ‘women are trained to be competitors against all others for ‘beauty’’ (1991: 76). The following example from *BJD* highlights the narrator’s understanding of the oppressive ‘self-hating, ever-failing, hungry and sexually insecure state of being aspiring beauties’ (Wolf 1991: 66) by comically putting a male, her homosexual best-friend Tom, in a beauty contest situation:

ST:

I am quite worried about Tom. I think taking part in a beauty contest has started to make him crack under the pressures we women have long been subjected to and he is becoming insecure, appearance-obsessed and borderline anorexic.

(Fielding 1998: 258)

TT:

Tom m’inquiète. Je crois que participer à un concours de beauté l’a soumis à des pressions que nous les femmes connaissons depuis longtemps. Il n’a plus confiance en lui, il est obsédé par son image et l’anorexie le guette.

(Fielding 2002: 286-287)

While the translation looks faithful at first glance, a closer examination reveals that Tom is subjected to the pressures that women are *used to*, not *subjected to*. The punctuation changes (a full stop instead of ‘and’) do not make as clear the correlation between beauty pressures and their negative consequences. In fact, the full stop makes the loss of self-confidence, the image-obsession and the anorexia Tom’s worrying problems rather than women’s general problems. In the original, the masculine pronoun ‘he’ appears once followed by three adjectives. This would have been linguistically possible in French and, for the first two elements, would have sounded the same regardless of the subject’s gender. However, the French translation has four masculine pronouns reminding the readers that it is Tom who suffers from insecurity, appearance-obsession and anorexia. Women are not portrayed as suffering from these but as being merely used to them.

The negative impact of beauty on women's lives is again transformed in the dubbing of the following scene from *SATC*:

ST:

Carrie: I find it fascinating that four beautiful flesh and blood women could be intimidated by some unreal fantasy. I mean look, look at this [holding an issue of *Glamour*]. Is this really intimidating to any of you? [...]

v.o: Suddenly I was interested. If models could cause otherwise rational individuals to crumble in their presence, exactly how powerful was beauty?

TT:

Carrie: Je trouve ça fascinant que quatre merveilleuses filles soient attirées voire intimidées par ces filles plastifiées de partout. Ça doit être plutôt désagréable. Regardez ça. Est-ce que ça vous fascine vraiment? [...]

v.o: Soudain, je me suis sentie intéressée. Si les mannequins pouvaient changer le comportement d'une femme, du moins l'influencer, quel était donc le pouvoir réel de la beauté?

(*SATC* Episode 2 'Models and Mortals' [4])

Here, the imaginary nature of models' appearance is replaced by unnaturalness, leaving their reality unquestioned. The negative impact of models on women is also significantly attenuated. The notion of intimidation is first replaced by attraction and only appears once, following the adverb *voire*. This presents it as an extreme version of the previously mentioned attraction, making it more akin to veneration. French Carrie's allusion to how 'rather unpleasant' this situation must be for women could be seen as an attempt to convey the negative connotations associated with intimidation in the original. However, her following question asking her friends whether they are really fascinated by the *Glamour* cover girl reinforces the notion of admiration. While models are positioned as physically superior beings in both the ST and the TT, women's relationship to this superiority changes from English into French. Unlike original Carrie who expresses the idea that unreal standards are being forced onto women, French Carrie re-establishes models' positive magnetism. It is all the more evident in Carrie's concluding voice-over. In the French, models do not make individuals crumble, they change and influence a woman's behaviour and there is no indication that this is done in a negative way. As the next example shows, heroines in chick TTs seem to have a different relationship to canons of feminine beauty and are not as willing to denounce either their detrimental impact or their origins in male imagination:



ST:

Miranda: The advantages given to models and to beautiful women in general are so unfair, it makes me want to puke!

Samantha: Sweetheart, you shouldn't say that, you're so cute.

Miranda: Cute doesn't cut it in this town. What's 'cute' compared to 'supermodel'? [...] What I want to know is when did all the men get together and decide they'd only get it up for giraffes with big breasts? [...] We should just admit that we live in a culture that promotes impossible standards of beauty.

Carrie: Yeah, except men think they're possible.

Miranda: Yeah.

TT:

Miranda: Les avantages qui sont donnés aux mannequins et aussi aux belles femmes me dépassent tellement que je voudrais tout de suite être encore plus bête et plus moche!

Samantha: Ma puce, ne dis pas ça, tu es très mignonne, je te jure.

Miranda: Mignonne, tu rigoles, pour te trouver un mâle, il faut être plus que mignonne [...]. Ce que je voudrais savoir c'est pourquoi et quand les hommes ont décidé de se farcir ce genre de femmes. On dirait des girafes [indistinct] [...]. Nous devrions juste admettre que nous vivons dans un monde où personne ne peut instaurer un nouveau standard de beauté.

Carrie: Oui, nous n'avons pas à nous juger les unes les autres.

Miranda: Oui.

(*SATC* Episode 2 'Models and Mortals' [5])

In this example, many shifts seem to have occurred in the dubbing process. Original Miranda's repulsion is gone and this is due to the fact that the unfairness of advantages given to beautiful women is also gone. Miranda no longer finds them 'unfair', she just does not understand them. There is a sense that she feels out of her league and that the standards are so beyond her that she would rather be more stupid and ugly. Moreover, her words establish a link between beauty and the ability to attract the opposite sex. If 'cute' is inadequate compared to supermodel in both the ST and the TT, the French specifies that it is inadequate in the search for a male partner, blurring the distinction between attractiveness and attractiveness to men. Interestingly, the notion of a male conspiracy is lessened, they did not 'get together'. What emerges as impossible is not the ability to live up to the current standard of beauty but the ability to establish a new one. Men's responsibility in perpetuating such standards (by believing that they are possible) disappears in favour of a suggestion that women do not have to 'judge one another'. Carrie's use of the plural female form 'les unes les autres' here clearly points to female responsibility. Women

are portrayed as willingly embracing and reinforcing standards of beauty and perceiving their peers as judges. Moreover, what prevents the establishment of a new standard of beauty is therefore not men's choice of supermodel women over cute ones but women's active mutual judgement. Not only are unfair and impossible standards no longer unfair and impossible but the solution offered by Carrie indicates that if women do suffer from these standards, they only have themselves – and each other – to blame. This is a striking departure from the original where the mention of men and their beliefs directly links the problem of beauty standards to remnants of 'the old habits of patriarchal societies [...] which produce envy, rivalry, bitterness, and isolation among women themselves, who compete for the prizes of female beauty under male dominance' (Young-Eisendrath 2002: 55). Significantly, the French refuses to acknowledge such male dominance and the patriarchal construction of female beauty and instead shifts the blame from its cause – patriarchy – to its result – female competition and rivalry.

A running argument in Frith-Powell's *Two Lipsticks and a Lover: The Secret of French Women's Elegance* could perhaps shed light on the suggestion that French women do not have to 'judge one another'. This journalistic investigation into French women's alleged effortless chic belongs to a wider body of works teaching Anglo-American women how to achieve French women's perceived fashionable style, slim figures and general attitude to life<sup>1</sup>. These books capitalise on a popular Anglo-American notion: French women are desirably feminine. Written by a British journalist living in France, *Two Lipsticks and a Lover* provides an interesting – albeit anecdotal – British account of the perceived differences between French and British women's socio-cultural realities and behaviours. Frith-Powell and her respondents stress what they view as a marked rivalry amongst French women over men, money and looks compared to British women who appear more 'sisterly' (Frith-Powell 2006: 105-116). One respondent advances a noteworthy explanation: female competition prevails in France because 'women are still oppressed by men and women defend themselves and get what they want by seducing men. Not sleeping

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<sup>1</sup> *French Women Don't Get Fat* (Guiliano 2005); *French Women For All Seasons: A Year of Secrets, Recipes and Pleasure* (Guiliano 2006); *Entre nous: A Woman's Guide to Finding Her Inner French Girl* (Ollivier 2004); *French Women Don't Sleep Alone* (Callan 2009).

with them but flirting. The downside to this is that it affects their relationship with other women' (in Frith-Powell 2006: 109). From a British point of view, French women thus appear to favour seductive relationships to men over 'sisterly' solidarity. Interestingly, this idea has been confirmed by the findings of a sociological study on sexuality in France (Béjin 1996). As female interviewees were found to be more responsive to male interviewers than female ones, their greater responsiveness was explained in the following terms: in a male interviewer, women see a *voyeur* whereas in a female interviewer, they see 'a potential judge' (Béjin 1996: 261). It is perhaps not surprising that in this context, Anglo-American feminists' insistence on female unity and the neologism *sororité*, modelled on the English 'sisterhood', never gained much popularity, even amongst French feminists who dismissed the term as 'gnan-gnan' (Bard 1999: 304). While the masculine *fraternité* (and motto of the French Republic) is rarely derided for its excessive sentimentality, a term conveying an equivalent idea for women is dismissed as soppy by feminists themselves. It could be suggested that against a dominant ideological model of female judgement, rivalry and isolation, any expression of female cohesion and harmony – in other words, women's positive feelings towards other women – is likely to appear excessive. In this dominant ideological model, women's feelings seem better directed towards the opposite sex. From this perspective, one sees how suggesting a less judgemental female attitude to solve the problem of oppressive beauty standards reflects a common belief about female mutual judgment. Moreover, by representing women as fascinated rather than oppressed by beauty standards, the French dubbing of *SATC* weakens women's understanding of the oppressive consequences of this fascination. As the following example from the translation of *MLOP* shows, chick TTs also remove terminology that could potentially help women articulate this oppression. Here, the narrator Clara describes Stella, a friend whose happiness and lack of sophistication she first mistook as feminist statements:

ST:

I went through a stage of bracing myself for the lecture on conforming to stereotypical patriarchal notions of female beauty, actually, but it never came. Stella isn't making any kind of point by wearing a bare face. Now that I know her, I doubt the idea of wearing rouge has ever occurred to her.

(Knight 2000: 54)

TT:

J'ai renoncé à la sermonner. Stella se sent bien dans sa peau de sauvage;  
l'idée de mettre du rouge à lèvres ne l'a jamais effleurée.  
(Knight 2002: 60)

This translation bears so little connection with the original that one might wonder whether the translator understood the ST. Yet the phrase 'stereotypical patriarchal notions of female beauty' leaves little doubt as to what Clara is referring to. Its disappearance seems to suggest that the questioning of the 'Sois belle...et tais-toi!' popular ideology<sup>2</sup> by the feminist slogan 'Nous ne sommes pas des poupées!' does not seem to have been taken seriously or given enough support amongst the public to be readily understandable by an average French reader. As Dixie observes, from an Anglo-American point of view, women in France 'have been less ready to crusade against gratuitous female nudity. What many reconstructed Anglo-Saxons see as leery exploitation is for many French people simply artistic appreciation of the beautiful female form' (2004: 255). This appreciation is such that, in the process of translation, the issues raised in chick STs seem to have been perceived as irrelevant or in contradiction with the dominant understanding and experience of female beauty. Issues raised by protagonists have therefore needed to be rewritten to conform to a more familiar ideological structure according to which

les hommes agissent, tandis que les femmes apparaissent. Les hommes regardent les femmes. Les femmes se regardent en étant observées par les hommes. Cela détermine non seulement le rapport entre les hommes et les femmes mais aussi le rapport des femmes à elles-mêmes. [...] Donc la femme se transforme en objet, et plus particulièrement en objet de vision: une apparence visuelle. [...] La construction sociale de la féminité et de la masculinité indique un rapport d'observateur à observé. (Freedman 1997: 81)

Instead of questioning the narrator's own superficiality, the translation implies that Clara is entitled to sermon her friend, reinforcing women's position as artistic objects to be looked at as well as the desirability of conforming to the very 'stereotypical patriarchal notions of female beauty'. The reversal of meaning also reflects an important popular representation of women in France: that of *courtisanes*. Indeed, in French popular ideology, 'every woman is a courtesan who knows how to make herself attractive, how to advise and to encourage men, with more or less skills'

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<sup>2</sup> epitomised by the Allégret film and Gainsbourg song of the same name released respectively in 1957 and 1960.

(Zeldin 1984: 435). As the following section will show, the image of the French courtesan who naturally knows how to please men is so pervasive that it appears in many unexpected places.

### 2.3. The Courtesan

As explained in Chapter 4, the concept of career when related to women has been handled with a problematic ambiguity in chick TTs, reflecting a persisting ideology which excludes women from legitimately accessing power in the public sphere. Yet, according to *Le Grand Robert*'s definition of *carrière*, there is one linguistically legitimate role women appear to be able to fulfil in the public sphere. To exemplify the definition of the noun, seven quotes are given: five have a male subject, one is non-gender specific and the only example with a female subject brings to light the connotations associated with the concept of a female career: 'se destiner à la carrière honteuse des courtisanes, avec l'intention d'en palper les avantages, tout en gardant la robe d'une honnête bourgeoise mariée – Balzac, *la Cousine Bette*' (Rey and Robert 2001: 1961). A woman's career prospects are therefore limited to a specific field: that of prostitution. *Le Grand Robert* is by no means an isolated case in associating a professional woman with a sex worker. In the French language, it is virtually 'impossible de dissocier l'image de la femme en général de celle de la prostituée' (Yaguello 1984: 154). Laubier, for instance, notes that 'in dictionaries of synonyms, such as the *Hachette Dictionnaire des synonymes*, it is [...] striking how many words referring to prostitutes appear as synonyms of 'femme', particularly in argot' (1990: 96). This lexicological 'amalgame presque total entre la femme et la putain' (Yaguello 1984: 155) has had a distinct impact on the translational treatment of certain aspects of female sexuality in chick TTs.

The first noteworthy shift from English to French concerns the word 'sexuality' itself when it is used in relation to women. In *AMB*, 'sexuality' becomes 'attraits sexuels' (*AMB* Episode 2 'Compromising Positions' [6]) while in *SATC*, the noun is translated by the Anglicism 'sex appeal' (*SATC* Episode 5 'The power of female sex' [7]). Women's sexuality is therefore understood in terms of their ability to attract and please the opposite sex. This shift appears in line with the image of the courtesan whose 'charm is deliberately cultivated to conquer man' (Zeldin 1984: 138). The

notion according to which a woman/courtesan's only power resides in gaining advantages from her ability to attract men helps shed light on many a transformation in the French translations as regards women's sexual behaviour. It seems particularly strong in the French dubbing of 'Models and Mortals', an episode of *SATC* devoted to men's and women's attitudes to, and relationships with, fashion models. In this particular passage, a 'modeliser' (a womaniser who prefers models) justifies himself for choosing models as sexual partners:

ST:

Why fuck the girl in the skirt if you can fuck the girl in the ad for the skirt?

TT:

Pourquoi baiser une fille avec une jupe, alors que la fille se laissera de toutes façons baiser pour faire la pub de cette jupe.

(*SATC* Episode 2 'Models and Mortals' [8])

Here, the modeliser's justification as to why he has sex with models and not 'normal' women is significantly modified. While the ST is not particularly flattering nor respectful to either the regular girl who simply wears a given skirt or the girl who models that very skirt in the advertising campaign, the French merges both women into a desperate aspiring model wearing a skirt and prepared to let the man have sexual intercourse with her in return for a modelling job. Not only does the TT make little logical sense but it also conflates the notion of an attractive woman and that of the courtesan using her attractiveness in exchange for advantages.

Of course, the ideological notion of a woman using her body for monetary or professional favours has not disappeared from Anglo-American cultures. Nevertheless, the debates the idea creates amongst characters in chick STs indicate an ambivalence as regards the legitimacy of such a practice. The following passage is an extract from such debates where Samantha's opinion on the matter is clearly not shared by her friends:

ST:

Samantha: Women have the right to use every means at their disposal to achieve power.

Miranda: Short of sleeping their way to the top.

Samantha: Not if that's what it takes to compete.

Charlotte: But that's exploitation!

TT:

Samantha: Les femmes ont le droit d'utiliser tous les moyens dont elles disposent pour atteindre le pouvoir.

Miranda: Comme coucher avec des mecs pour arriver au sommet.

Samantha: Pas forcément, ce n'est pas toujours nécessaire.

Charlotte: Mais c'est de l'exploitation!

(SATC Episode 5 'The power of female sex' [9])

In this passage, Samantha advocates women's right to use their sexual power in order to achieve greater power. She sees sexuality as another advantage to be exploited and to be used in the face of competition. This argument contrasts with Miranda's and Charlotte's view that sleeping one's way to the top is submitting oneself to sexual exploitation. While original Samantha's voice is clearly that of the minority in the ST, she is supported by Miranda whose argument seems even more extreme than her own in the TT. Indeed, Miranda no longer disagrees with Samantha and actually furthers her friend's point by exemplifying it, validating rather than rejecting the practice of having sex in order to advance one's career. Interestingly, French Samantha tempers Miranda's opinion by pointing out that resorting to such a measure is not always necessary. First of all, this suggests that in some cases, *coucher* is necessary and nowhere is this notion more evident than in the French phrase *promotion canapé*. *Promotion canapé* was in fact the title of a comedy<sup>3</sup> whose success suggests that the concept of a woman's professional advancement – in mail services in this film – through sexual favours is a highly entertaining one. In politics too, 'il existe toujours une présupposition qui dit qu'une femme qui monte dans la hiérarchie d'un parti politique doit le faire grâce à la faveur d'un homme' (Freedman 1997: 132). Secondly, French Samantha's response to Miranda also implies that in order to gain power, being a sexually appealing woman often suffices. This is reminiscent of the aforementioned argument that French women obtain what they want by flirting – but not necessarily sleeping – with men (in Frith-Powell 2006: 109). This idea is also echoed in Freedman's empirical research on female politicians. In her study, Freedman observes a distinct difference between her French and British respondents as regards the idea of women legitimately using their power of seduction in order to achieve political power. British female politicians dislike

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<sup>3</sup> Directed by Didier Kaminka and released in 1990.

being perceived as attractive women (Freedman 1997: 126) whereas many French female politicians – including former prime minister Cresson – do not find using ‘l’arme de la séduction’ shameful or unpleasant (Freedman 1997: 127-129). One of her French respondents, however, disagrees with her peers and stresses that in this respect, there is a

grande différence entre les Américaines du Nord et les Françaises. Les Françaises ont toujours gardé une croyance en la vertu de la séduction, du pouvoir spécial qu’auraient les femmes sur les hommes par d’autres moyens que la lutte pour l’égalité simplement. On pense toujours qu’on peut avoir du pouvoir parce qu’on séduit. Et j’ai toujours admiré chez les femmes en Amérique, chez les femmes qui s’occupent un peu de politique, une attitude qui est beaucoup plus nette, une attitude beaucoup plus carrée qui est: ‘D’accord, on séduit les hommes, mais les hommes nous séduisent aussi’. Mais en France on est dans un pays latin où on imagine que la séduction est une affaire de femmes. Moi, j’ai toujours dit que nous étions aussi des êtres sexués et donc que les hommes pouvaient aussi nous séduire. Mais pour nous, l’homme, c’est la puissance, il écrase, il prend le pouvoir, il donne des ordres, et la femme, elle arrive à prendre beaucoup plus de pouvoir, dit-on toujours, mais comme ça, en souriant, en étant mignonne, en coulant des regards et tout ça. Et ça, je trouve que c’est assez désagréable. Donc, cette conscience d’être une femme reste très forte dans un pays latin. (Freedman 1997: 129-130)

The idea that women can gain power through seduction is therefore rooted in France’s values as a Latin culture and the way in which the French media accounted for Ségolène Royal’s presidential campaign shows that it persists ten years after Freedman’s study (Pralong 2007). There seems to be much less ambivalence as regards the legitimacy of female use of sexual attractiveness to gain advantages and in many ways, the French dubbing of *SATC* reinforces the legitimacy and desirability of doing so. This is clearly the case in the following example where Carrie ponders the life of Amalita, an Italian acquaintance of hers who defines herself as ‘a citizen of the world’:

ST:

I envied Amalita. Her life was a blur of rich men, designer clothes and glamorous resorts. She didn’t actually work for a living, yet possessed a dazzling sexual power that she exploited to her full advantage, which presented a certain conundrum. Where’s the line between professional girlfriend and just plain professional?

TT:

J’enviais Amalita. Sa vie était un véritable tourbillon d’hommes, de vêtements haute couture, de vacances de rêve. Elle ne travaillait pas pour vivre, elle possédait un éblouissant pouvoir de séduction qu’elle exploitait à



sa guise, ce qui représentait pour moi une énigme totale. Où est la limite entre une petite amie très expérimentée et une poule de luxe?

(*SATC* Episode 5 ‘The power of female sex’ [10])

Zieger notes that this particular episode ‘does make a moral argument against prostitution’ (2004: 105). Carrie’s puzzlement at Amalita’s life lies in the fact that she does not work yet possesses a dazzling sexual power. As Carrie’s question shows, this is because possessing dazzling sexual power is, in fact, Amalita’s job. While this reasoning is retained in the subtitles (Appendix 20 [10]), the dubbing presents many transformations. Amalita’s sexual power changes to power of seduction, following the abovementioned pattern of reducing female sexuality to female ability to seduce. Moreover, the men Amalita meets are no longer identified as wealthy. The dubbing actress’s enumerating tone from ‘un véritable tourbillon...’ to ‘guise’ and the omission of ‘yet’ place Amalita’s unemployment and dazzling power of seduction on a par with the men, clothes and holidays, thus defining them as two enviable characteristics rather than two puzzlingly incompatible notions. Carrie’s bafflement is somehow greater in the French but, unlike the original, it does not seem related to the morality behind Amalita’s use of her body in exchange for a luxurious lifestyle. In fact, the contrast Carrie establishes between sexually intimate girlfriends and prostitutes is lost in the TT through the choice of ‘poule de luxe’ as an equivalent for ‘plain professional’. Indeed, ‘poule’ is a ‘femme (considérée du point de vue de ses rapports avec les hommes)’; a ‘femme, fille de conquête facile, le plus souvent entretenue’; a ‘maîtresse ou concubine d’un homme’ or a ‘femme qui vit de ses charmes, *poule de luxe* (familier)’ (*TLFi*). There is therefore little lexicological difference between a woman, a woman with whom one has a relationship without being married to her (‘maîtresse ou concubine’), a kept woman or a woman who makes a living out of her charms. Thus, instead of establishing a moral line between girlfriends and prostitutes, French Carrie’s question further blurs the distinction between women, female lovers and whores, reinforcing the French popular ‘métaphore de la femme comme animal (surtout volaille)’<sup>4</sup> (Yaguello 1984: 155) and

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, the English language also has its share of roost metaphors to define women, ‘chick’ itself (often translated as *poulette*), hen or mother-hen (*poule* or *mère-poule*) but significantly none of them bear *poule*’s connotation of prostitution.

her role as ‘a sexual object and lover for her man’ (Kofman 1998: 95). While this image of the sexually objectified *courtisane* seems to pertain more to ideology than to poetics, the next section will look at how chick TTs establish a poetological and ideological dichotomy between sexually prudish and sexually depraved women.

#### 2.4. The Prudery and Depravation Dichotomy

The French translational treatment of female sexuality shows a distinct tendency to resort to the moral dichotomy of prudery and depravation. The first example is from *BJD* where Bridget and her boyfriend Daniel have an argument in which she has just accused him of being an emotional ‘fuckwit’. This is Daniel’s reply:

ST:

What about you, this week? First you completely ignore me like some Hitler Youth ice-maiden, then you turn into an irresistible sex kitten, looking at me over the computer with not so much ‘come-to-bed’ as just ‘come’ eyes, and now suddenly you’re Jeremy Paxman.

(Fielding 1996: 76)

TT:

Mais qu’est-ce qui te prend, cette semaine? Tu commences par te montrer glaciale, une authentique garce hitlérienne, puis tu te transformes en chatte en chaleur, tu me lances des regards brûlants de concupiscence et maintenant voilà que tu joues les saintes nitouches!

(Fielding 1998: 88)

In this example, the sex kitten or ‘young woman who asserts or exploits her sexual attractiveness’ (*OED*) could be said to stem from the Cosmo girl whose playful masquerade draws attention to her hyper-femininity as a performance rather than an essence (see Chapter 1, section 4.2.2.2.). In the TT, this playful sex kitten has been rewritten into a she-cat in heat. Not only does this translation reduce Bridget to her biological function, but *chatte* is also a very derogatory way of referring to female genitalia in the French language. The sex kitten has turned into a double insult: one of sexual passivity and an offensive reference to Bridget’s genitals. The disappearance of ‘sex kitten’ is all the more interesting since a French equivalent appears to exist according to the *Collins-Robert* bilingual dictionary. However, as the definition shows, playful confidence is replaced by sexual attractiveness itself: ‘minette très sexy’ (Varrod 2000: 1816). Both ‘une chatte en chaleur’ and ‘minette très sexy’ appear to indicate that the identity of a woman confidently exploiting her

sex-appeal needs to be rewritten into a woman who merely possesses sex-appeal, thus rewriting self-constructed feminine attractiveness into natural attractiveness. As the translation of *BJD* shows, portraying women explicitly seeking sexual attention and coition seems difficult. Indeed, the relatively direct ‘looking at me over the computer with not so much “come-to-bed” as just “come” eyes’ is rewritten into tamer ‘des regards brûlants de concupiscence’. Such a shift fits in with the editorial practices of diluting and embellishing explicit sexual references in the French translations of Anglo-American romances (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.6.). Bridget is thus rewritten here as a heroine whose eyes can suggest sexual passion but not sexual climax itself.

The French translation of ‘Hitler Youth ice-maiden’ by ‘une authentique garce hitlérienne’ is equally telling. According to *Le Grand Robert*, a *garce* is a ‘fille de mauvaise vie, dans un vocabulaire lié aux préjugés masculins, femme/fille qui se comporte mal avec les hommes, les attire et les désappointe, etc.’ (Rey and Robert 2001: 1203). In its modern, colloquial and pejorative sense, a *garce* is also a ‘femme (équivalent à salaud)’ (Ibid.). The definition of *salaud* itself is enlightening: ‘(avec une valeur sexuelle non dépréciative) homme salace’ (Rey and Robert 2001: 137-138). In this definition, *Le Grand Robert* notes that ‘l’absence de péjoration dans cet emploi à l’inverse des sens correspondants de salope reflète évidemment un état de l’idéologie et des mœurs dans lequel la liberté sexuelle est valorisée chez l’homme et déprisée chez la femme’ (Ibid.). The translation of ‘maiden’ by offensive *garce* thus adds a negative sexual connotation to Daniel’s accusations. Through her choice of equivalents, the translator provides us with the dominant ideology of the target system, a system in which representations of female sexuality and female sexual agency appear defined by male prejudices. As Birh and Pfefferkorn observe, one still sees in French society a strong

persistance des représentations traditionnelles de la sexualité avantageant les hommes: alors que l’image du ‘tombeur’ ou du ‘Don Juan’ reste valorisante, conduisant facilement les hommes à se vanter de leurs ‘conquêtes’ voire à inventer, celle de la ‘femme facile’ et ‘légère’ est au contraire difficile à assumer, tant elle assimile rapidement celle qui est attribuée à la prostituée. (2002: 280)

According to an equivalent study in Britain in 1994, a similar double standard persists in the English language between ‘stud’ and ‘a bit of a lad’ for men and ‘slag’ and ‘tart’ for women (Johnson and Wadsworth 1994: 102). However, the authors of this study do not mention of the image of the prostitute and are keen to point out that this does not reflect recent ‘apparent changes in attitudes towards female sexuality promoted by the women’s movement’ (Ibid.). In contrast, the representation of female sexuality in French appears to remain caught in the image of the prostitute which reduces women to their function as sexual objects to be consumed and prevents them from being active sexual subjects.

Last but not least, Daniel’s accusation ‘Jeremy Paxman’ defines Bridget as assertive and sceptical while the French ‘Sainte Nitouche’ accuses her of prudery. Interestingly, the name of the famous BBC journalist did not bear the same treatment as other British figures which are either paraphrased, Frenchified or bear an explicative footnote in the translation. The French chooses to characterise Bridget as a prude, using yet another sexual stereotype. Three interrelated reasons could be advanced for this particular translation. Firstly, as Chapter 4 has shown, there is a strong ambivalence towards women displaying masculine qualities in the public sphere. As Paxman is considered to be a ‘public inquisitor’ i.e. a ‘media figure [...] empowered to engage in particular forms of aggressive, interrogatory dialogue’ (Talbot 2007: 121), maintaining the original comparison may have been ideologically problematic. Secondly, as section 2.6. will show, the ideological ambivalence as regards the definition of women as potentially masculine appears even stronger in the private sphere within which Bridget and Daniel’s conversation could be said to be located. Thirdly, this particular translation could be due to the French language itself which tends ‘to confine portrayals of women within certain moral and physical extremes, such as vice/virtue, prostitute/angel, ugly/beautiful’ (Laubier 1990: 96). According to this ‘dichotomie bien établie’ (Yaguello 1984: 151), while a sexually active woman is a whore, a sexually inactive woman is a prude. As Chapter 2 has demonstrated, explicit and binary characterisation has been a central poetological component of the romantic genre. Daniel’s original complaint about the contrast between Bridget’s sexual suggestion and assertive inquisition is thus rewritten into a common poetological contrast found in romantic texts (the

corrupt woman vs. the chaste one) and a complaint likely to be ideologically coherent with complaints commonly made about a badly behaved *garce* who attracts and disappoints men. This would explain why the withdrawal of Bridget's previous sexual invitation is depicted as prudery in the French rather than as the result of Bridget's anger and scepticism at Daniel's excuses.

In the following example from the novel *SATC*, the translation of the gerund 'pretending not to' is also clearly influenced by the gender of its subject and the male prejudices mentioned above:

ST:

They always brought their girlfriends, so there were squadrons of these women looking for men and pretending not to.

(Bushnell 1996: 89)

TT:

Chacune venant toujours accompagnée de ses copines, il se forme ainsi des escadrons entiers de femmes lancées à blocs dans la chasse au mâle avec des airs de saintes-nitouches.

(Bushnell 2000: 120)

Like the French translation of *BJD*, this translation adds a moral connotation to female sexual behaviour, defining a female reluctance to be or appear sexually interested as prudery. The same could be said about the explicative insertion about the television character Mary Tyler Moore in the following passage:

ST:

What if, on the other hand, you're forty and pretty and you're a television producer or have your own PR company but you still live in a studio and sleep on a foldout couch – the nineties equivalent of Mary Tyler Moore? Except, unlike Mary Tyler Moore, you've actually gone to bed with all those guys instead of demurely kicking them out at 12:02 A.M?

(Bushnell 1996: 25)

TT:

Imaginons une jolie femme de quarante ans, productrice de télévision ou directrice de sa propre agence de relations publiques, mais qui vit dans un studio et dort sur un canapé-lit – une sorte de Mary Tyler Moore des années quatre-vingt-dix. À ceci près que, contrairement à Mary Tyler Moore, qui était une oie blanche, elle a couché avec toutes ses conquêtes au lieu de les renvoyer sagement chez elles dès les douze coups de minuit sonnés.

(Bushnell 2000: 41)

In the ST, the generic ‘you’ and the rhetorical questions solicit the reader’s identification with the woman described. The French distances itself from the woman by encouraging its readers to imagine her, rather than imagining being her. As seen in Chapter 2 (section 3.2.3), French readers are unlikely to be familiar with Mary Tyler Moore since the series in which she stars was never aired on French television. To aid French readers’ comprehension, the heroine is defined as an ‘oie blanche’, i.e. ‘entre la bêtise et la candeur [...] jeune fille qui a reçu une éducation pudibonde, qui est niaise’ (*TLFi*). The definition of the adjective *pudibond* sheds further light on the implications of *oie blanche*: ‘qui est d’une réserve excessive et généralement déplacée notamment en ce qui concerne certaines parties du corps et les choses relatives au sexe’ (*TLFi*). While the ST does not cast a judgement on Mary Tyler Moore, the TT rewrites her into a woman whose attitude towards sex is excessively prudish. In the next example from the series *SATC*, Charlotte’s initial plan to conceal her sexual interest in her date to keep him interested is transformed in French Carrie’s voice-over along similar lines:

ST:

Though Charlotte wanted to play hard to get, she didn’t want the evening to end too abruptly.

TT:

Si Charlotte avait décidé de ne pas jouer les ‘Marie-couche-toi-là’, elle ne voulait pas que cette soirée se termine trop brutalement.

(*SATC* Episode 1 ‘Sex and the City’ [11])

Charlotte’s original observance of the golden dating ‘rule’ according to which a woman must remain aloof to maintain her potential partner’s romantic interest (Fein and Schneider 1995) becomes a reluctance to come across as a *Marie-couche-toi-là*, in other words a ‘femme facile, débauchée’ (*TLFi*). Charlotte’s fear of appearing overly interested in her date is thus rewritten into the fear of ‘getting a reputation’ associated with prostitution. This shift from a woman ‘playing hard to get’ to an ‘easy lay’ morally condemns the woman who would not abstain from sexual intercourse with a date. The dichotomy between sexually depraved and sexually prude women is thus based on an intrinsic paradox: those who go to bed with their conquests are debauched while those who do not are (like Mary Tyler Moore) excessively naïve as regards sexual organs and matters. Moreover, the imperative

contained in *Marie-couche-toi-là*, redefines the sexually active woman as a passive individual who would lie down on command. Considering that *couche-toi* is a common order given to dogs, one can see how central the ‘qualities of submission [and] passivity’ (Kofman 1998: 95) are to the dominant representation of femininity in general and female sexuality in particular in French. The conceptual association of female sexuality with animal submission and passivity is particularly apparent in the following example from the translation of an exchange between Libby and her colleague in *MM*:

ST:

‘You’re in love, aren’t you?’ she says

‘Nope’ I shake my head. ‘definitely not. But...’[...] ‘I may well be in lust.’

(Green 1999: 44)

TT:

- Tu es amoureuse? me demande-t-elle.

- Pas du tout. (Je secoue la tête.) Mais alors pas du tout! Mais [...] je suis peut-être en chaleur!

(Green 2001: 50)

Like Bridget’s, Libby’s sexual desire and lust are expressed in terms of animal reproduction. It is as though active female sexuality could not be conveyed outwith the realm of either moral depravation or reproductive biology. In contrast, sexual inactivity or feigned or real lack of sexual interest in a woman is rewritten as sexual prudery. As the following section will show, another dimension has been added to the representation of women’s sexuality in the process of translation: that of romance.

## **2.5. The Normative Frame of Romance**

This section looks at chick TTs’ propensity to reframe certain aspects of female sexuality within a romantic experience. Indeed, female characters’ status as romantic heroines seems to have informed a number of translational choices regarding allusions to specific sexual behaviours. In the following example from the series *SATC*, Charlotte worries about her addiction to her recently purchased vibrator:

ST:

I’m scared if I keep using it, I’ll never be able to enjoy sex with a man again.

TT:

J'ai peur que si j'arrête pas de l'utiliser, je sois bien moins attirée par les hommes qu'avant.

(*SATC* Episode 9 'The Turtle and the Hare' [12])

In the TT, Charlotte's potential ability to climax during intercourse disappears and is rewritten into an ability to be attracted to men, thus relocating her concern to the preliminary stage of seduction and courtship rather than the sexual act itself. Like Bridget's 'come' eyes, Charlotte's explicit reference to orgasm is diluted in order to conform to a dominant model of romantic heroine whose sexual desire and pleasure are only legitimate if they are initiated by and subordinate to male desire (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.6.). The following passage from *AMB* is an equally enlightening example. It should be noted that *AMB* is the only text of this research to be entirely penned by a heterosexual man, which may explain the heroines' overt obsession with Glenn's phallus (Glenn is a life model at her sculpture class) and Ally's view of her own arousal as being in heat rather than in lust. Despite this, many elements in this conversation serve to characterise Ally as more actively sexual than passively romantic:

ST:

Ally: We couldn't have less in common. Still...

Renée: Well, these are certainly horny times.

Ally: It has nothing to do with the size of his...shoe. [...] He's leaving the country on Sunday.

Renée: Two ships colliding in the night.

Ally: I probably would have resorted to my prudish little self but I might not have. Maybe it's that nineteen-year-old. He's got me in heat.

TT:

Ally: Nous deux, on a vraiment rien en commun. Il est trop...

Renée: Je vois, il a des arguments assez intimidants.

Ally: Non, ça n'a rien à voir avec la taille de ses... chaussures. [...] Il quitte le pays dimanche.

Renée: Il sera passé telle une étoile filante dans le ciel de ta vie.

Ally: Je devrais peut-être faire appel à ma prudence légendaire mais il m'attire, c'est fou. J'ai l'impression d'avoir dix-neuf ans. Il m'a eue, en plein cœur.

(*AMB* Episode 12 'Cro-Magnon' [13])

As Ally makes it clear that she is not romantically attracted to Glenn, Renée's comment on the 'horniness' of the times clearly refers to Ally's sexual excitement.



This excitement disappears from the TT and is replaced by another mention of the size of Glenn's penis. This shift of focus repositions Glenn, Ally's object of desire, as an active sexual subject who possesses phallic arguments to intimidate her into sex. Renée's metaphor of two ships colliding in the night presents both lovers as equally sexually aroused and active in this brief encounter. French Renée's image, however, does not convey this sense of mutuality and equality in sexual behaviour. Glenn is compared to a shooting star, crossing the sky of Ally's life. Not only does this comparison give a romantic tone to Ally and Glenn's casual relationship but he is also defined as active while she remains passive. The most significant transformation occurs in Ally's last sentence. In the original (and in the subtitles, see Appendix 20 [13]), Ally blames the young man she is currently defending in court for her sudden sexual attraction to Glenn. French Ally justifies this attraction in altogether different terms. Her mention of the nineteen-year-old who has been sexually arousing her disappears and it is she who giddily feels nineteen again as a consequence of meeting Glenn. She defines her attraction to him as 'crazy' and a result of Glenn attracting her and getting her, 'in her heart'. Unlike the ST where Ally appears as a subject capable of sexual desire while remaining emotionally detached, the TT defines Ally as a romantic individual prone to passionate emotions. These changes point to the problematic notion of female sexual arousal outside a romantic relationship in French culture where 'la relation affective et conjugale apparaît [...] comme le cadre normatif de la relation sexuelle pour les femmes' (Bozon 2001: 254-255). Of course, the idea that women, more than men, show an 'understanding of sexual expression [...] bound up with issues of love and tied to notions of sexual intimacy' (Johnson 2005: 60-61) is also present in Anglo-American cultures. Yet, recently, this understanding has been portrayed as nonexclusive to the female sex (Johnson 2005: 74) and women tend to be represented in sociological studies as demonstrating

a definite ability to separate out the discourses of love and sex [which] gives a form of legitimacy to the experience of 'pure sex' outside of any romantic or love relationship. Access to this type of sexual expression for women (the legitimacy of the 'one-night-stand') relies on a series of inter-connected historical changes which include greater access to more efficient birth-control, the decline of the 'virgin before marriage' narrative of romance and the effects of changes in women's 'public' lives (in terms of the changing patterns of work and economic status). (Johnson 2005: 60)

In contrast, contemporary French sociology still insists on ‘la relation souvent forte qui existe chez les femmes entre sentiment et sexualité’ (Mossuz-Lavau 2002: 124) and the inherent differences between men and women in that respect: ‘les femmes associent de façon indivisible la sexualité et l’affectivité alors que les hommes dissocient très souvent le sexuel et l’affectif dans leur considérations’ (Mossuz-Lavau 2002: 140). French sociological discursive practices on female sexuality thus reinforce the idea that women cannot express sexual desire outside of an emotional attachment. As Mossuz-Lavau explains, in France, there is

une norme sociale qui dit que les femmes doivent toujours se justifier. Tout au long des siècles, on a considéré que les femmes avaient des relations sexuelles pour avoir des enfants, qu’elles étaient avant tout, sinon exclusivement, des épouses et des mères. Plus récemment, on a admis qu’elles pouvaient avoir des relations sexuelles pour avoir du plaisir mais à condition d’avoir ‘une bonne raison’, et pour le moins donc, être amoureuse – ce qui n’est pas exigé des hommes. (2005: 75-76)

In demonstrating two interrelated French values – that female sexual desire is to be articulated within a romantic relationship (no matter how brief) and that women cannot have sex without being passionately in love – the TT of *AMB* reflects and reinforces such ideological norms by denying French viewers the idea that women can have sexual intercourse outside of romantic relationships. In doing so, the TT rewrites Ally into a poetologically and ideologically acceptable heroine in romantic texts.

The next example from the dubbing of *SATC* also demonstrates a need to reposition a non-romantic expression of female sexuality, namely female casual promiscuity, within a romantic attachment. In this passage, Charlotte is considering having a threesome with her boyfriend Jack and another woman ‘to bring them closer’ and Carrie asks her if she does not think that sleeping with someone whom she does not know in order to get closer to Jack is weird. This is Charlotte’s reply:

ST:

But how well do we ever know the people we sleep with?

TT:

Mais on connaît vraiment celui avec qui on partage sa vie?

(*SATC* Episode 8 ‘Three is a Crowd’ [14])

While original Charlotte is referring to how little she and her friends know the numerous sexual partners with whom they are shown to have intercourse, episode after episode, French Charlotte asks whether one truly knows the male partner with whom they share their lives. This shift from sexual promiscuity to sexual monogamy shows a reluctance to convey the idea that women can have sex with individuals whom they do not really know. Ironically, the change in meaning makes the formation of emotional relationships with someone whom they do not really know seem more acceptable.

This unwillingness to express female sexuality without an emotional connection is particularly evident in the following example from *SATC*. Here, Carrie is wondering about her loss of control over her casual sexual relationship with Kurt whom she bumps into at a nightclub and sees kissing another woman:

ST:

Did all men secretly want their women promiscuous and emotionally detached? And if I was really having sex like a man, why didn't I feel more in control?

TT:

Est-ce que tous les hommes désiraient en secret que leurs femmes soient entièrement détachées d'eux? Et si j'avais vraiment fait l'amour comme un homme, pourquoi n'arrivais-je pas à combler mes émotions?

(*SATC* Episode 1 'Sex and the City' [15])

Significantly, while the idea that men want their female partners to be 'detached' is strengthened by the adverb 'entièrement', the nature of this detachment differs in the French. Indeed, both 'promiscuous' and 'emotionally' are missing from Carrie's voice-over, revealing the ideological impossibility of portraying women separating not only themselves sexually and emotionally from men but also sex from emotions. This is especially apparent in the dubbing of Carrie's second sentence: her lack of control over the situation is rewritten into an inability to control her emotions. Last but not least, the change of narrative tense from the continuous past to the *plus-que-parfait*, reduces Carrie's ability to have sex like a man (as she did with Kurt) to a never-to-be-repeated experiment in the dubbing. This reinforces the ambivalence towards women having sex like men which will be discussed in the next section.

In rewriting chick heroines into French romantic heroines, chick TTs suggest that from a poetological and ideological point of view, the acceptability of a woman's sexual behaviour is not only defined by male values but also depends on her emotional bond to a given male. As shown in Chapter 2 (sections 2.2.2. and 2.2.6.), the romantic poetics rely on fixed gender roles and the hero's superiority over the heroine. As the following three sections will show, this poetological gender hierarchy and the ideological subordination of women's sexuality to men's result in a number of shifts in the translational rendering of sexually masculine women, female sexual agency and pleasure.

## 2.6. Sexually Masculine Women

This section explores the ambivalence towards sexually masculine women in chick TTs, notably when the aforementioned poetological hierarchy between men and women is subverted or reversed in chick STs. The first example from the dubbing of *AMB* shows a distinct unwillingness to let Ally characterise herself as sexually masculine:

ST:

Where does it say that women can't act like men sometimes? I saw a piece of cute meat so I said to myself: 'You only live once! Be a man!'

TT:

Il est écrit quelque part que les filles n'ont pas le droit de réagir comme des mecs? Et puis j'ai vu un morceau de chair appétissant. J'ai pensé: 'On ne vit qu'une fois, prends ton pied!'

(*AMB* Episode 2 'Compromising Positions' [16])

While the reason for the switch from men's action to men's reaction is unclear, one fact is evident in the example above: Ally can tell herself to have fun but she cannot tell herself to be a man. A similar shift appears in the translation of *SATC*. Here, one of the narrator's respondents explains the reasoning behind a female acquaintance's sexual attitude:

ST:

'Her idea is that she can be like a guy,' explains Ian. 'Her idea is: Why do women have to be different from men? If a man can have sex with every girl he wants, why can't she have sex with every guy she wants?'

(Bushnell 1996: 66)

TT:

Son truc à elle, c'est de se conduire en mec, explique Ian. Elle se dit: Pourquoi faut-il que les femmes soient différentes des hommes? Si un homme a envie de coucher avec toutes les nanas qu'il rencontre, pourquoi pas moi?

(Bushnell 2000: 93)

The woman described here behaves like a man in the TT but unlike the ST, she cannot 'be like' one. There are two further subtle changes. A man is no longer portrayed as being able to have sex with any woman he wants but as wanting to have sex with every girl he meets. The implication of this reasoning is that the woman who has sex like a man here does not actually have sex with everyone she wants but sexually desires everybody she meets. Similarly, the simplification of Ian's final question 'why can't she have sex with every guy she wants?' to 'pourquoi pas moi?' does not create a repetition with a man's sexual behaviour and thus does not make as evident the reversal of the traditional gender script. The translation of *SATC* also presents another remarkable departure from the ST. The woman described in the above example is labelled (by Ian) as 'crazy' (Bushnell 1996: 66). The French translates this non-gender specific adjective by a noun: 'nympho' (Bushnell 2000: 93), a colloquial abbreviation for nymphomaniac. From an Anglo-American point of view, nymphomania has been seen as 'an outmoded, chauvinistic word' (Levitt in Groneman 2001: 139) whose abandonment has been championed by British and American sexologists. As Groneman remarks, feminine hypersexuality is now even glamorised in Anglo-American popular culture (2001: 141) and 'lots of sexual desire, even many sexual partners, does not automatically label a woman "sick"' (2001: 157). The use of the nymphomaniac label in its abbreviated form shows not only how common such an insult is in spoken French but also a persisting need to pathologize female sexuality threatening 'le primat du désir masculin' (Ferrand 2004: 96). While the desire of a sexually masculine woman is rewritten as uncontrollable and abnormal, her behaviour is equated to moral depravation in the following passage:

ST:

I asked if there was any way to pull off this whole 'women having sex like men' thing.

‘You’ve got to be a real bitch,’ said Charlotte. ‘Either that, or you’ve got to be incredibly sweet and nice. We fall through the cracks. It confuses men.’

‘It’s too late for sweet’ Carrie said.

‘Then I guess you’re just gonna have to become a bitch’ Magda said.

(Bushnell 1996: 42)

TT:

Je demande alors s’il est réaliste de penser qu’un jour les femmes auront le même comportement sexuel que les hommes.

‘Faut être une véritable pute, dit Charlotte. C’est soit ça, soit jouer la carte de la douceur et de la gentillesse. Y a pas de milieu. Les hommes ne savent plus où ils en sont.

- Pour la gentillesse, c’est trop tard, dit Carrie.

- Alors t’as plus qu’à devenir une garce, dit Magda.’

(Bushnell 2000: 64)

While the narrator enquires about how to have sex like a man without drawing attention to oneself in the ST, the TT asks whether women having the same sexual behaviour as men will be, in the future tense, realistic, suggesting that this state of affairs is currently unrealistic. Although both Charlotte and Magda can already have sex like men, the translation appears to rewrite this ability to conform to the representation of female sexual behaviour in French sociological and journalistic studies. Indeed, while Anglo-American reports often point to the increasing convergence of men’s and women’s sexual behaviours (Schwartz and Rutter 1998: 37), in areas such as number of partners and engagement in casual sex (Kamen 2000)(Quilliam 1994), sexual desire (Regan and Berscheid 1999: 58), pursuit of sexual pleasure (Hite 2000: 581) and initiation of the sexual act (Fillion 1997: 312-313, 316), equivalent French reports have a tendency to stress differences between the sexes. One of the most recent and complete empirical surveys on sexuality in France, for instance, quotes a female respondent as regards one of the deterrents for women to initiate sexual intercourse: ‘si la femme prend l’initiative, on est prise pour des prostituées’ (Mossuz-Lavau 2002: 191). This sheds light on Charlotte and Magda’s replies to the narrator and the translator’s choice of equivalents for ‘bitch’ are particularly significant. Although the French also mentions two opposite behaviours as a way of confusing men, it does not convey that these serve to distract the attention from women’s masculine sexual attitude. First of all, ‘bitch’ becomes ‘pute’. Yet, in English, ‘bitch’ in the abusive sense of ‘a lewd or sensual woman’ (*OED*) no longer exists in modern use. Its current meaning is ‘a malicious or

treacherous woman' (Ibid.) and constitutes more of a social insult than a sexual one. This change from an unpleasant woman to one who charges men for sex fits in the abovementioned value which defines active female sexual initiation in terms of prostitution. This is reinforced by the second translation of 'bitch' by 'garce'. A woman who has sex like a man is thus defined either as a whore or a woman who behaves badly with men. In the process of translation, this woman is rewritten as the exact opposite of the positively defined 'kind' or 'sweet' woman, reinstating the dichotomy of moral extremes between the caring woman and the morally depraved prostitute, in other words between 'la maman et la putain' (Yaguello 1984: 151) where an intermediate *milieu* is impossible.

The possibility of women's sexual behaviour being similar to men is a concept that the dubbing team of the series *SATC* finds equally problematic in the televisual adaptation of the abovementioned exchange:

ST:

You think it's really possible to pull off this whole 'women having sex like men' thing?

TT:

Donc tu crois qu'il est vraiment possible qu'une femme arrive, enfin, [pause] qu'elle arrive à n'être plus qu'un sexe comme un homme?

(*SATC* Episode 1 'Sex and the City' [17])

In the original, Carrie's question is somehow rhetorical as her friends are here united in their opinion that they already have sex like men. Again, the notion of women 'pulling off' having sex like men is lost and another difference emerges at the level of performance. Indeed, there is a hesitating pause in French Carrie's voice and an awkwardness in both her delivery and her choice of words, giving precedence to the opposite notion that men are biologically driven to be 'just a sex'. When Carrie finally decides to test out her friends' theory, the rewards are weakened in the TT:

ST:

I'd just had sex like a man. I left feeling powerful, potent and incredibly alive.

TT:

Je venais de baiser comme un mec. Une fois dans la rue, je me sentais forte et incroyablement vivante.

(*SATC* Episode 1 ‘Sex and the City’ [18])

While she feels incredibly alive in both versions, Carrie no longer feels potent or powerful but simply strong in the TT. This attenuation not only fits in the wider pattern of attenuation as regards women’s expression of power in chick TTs but also indicates an effort to rearticulate issues surrounding sexually masculine women. This effort is particularly present in the dubbing of Carrie’s conversation with Big – Carrie’s love interest – about her work as ‘a sexual anthropologist’:

ST:

Carrie: I’m researching an article about women who have sex like men. You know, they have sex and then afterwards they feel nothing.

Big: But you’re not like that.

Carrie: Well, aren’t you?

TT:

Carrie: En ce moment, je m’intéresse aux femmes qui gèrent le sexe comme les hommes. Celles qui ont des relations sans avoir le moindre sentiment.

Big: Mais vous n’êtes pas comme ça.

Carrie: Non. Et vous?

(*SATC* Episode 1 ‘Sex and the City’ [19])

Interestingly, French Carrie claims that she does not belong to the category of women who are here shown to ‘handle’ but not have sex like men. This is an interesting departure from the original since Carrie does, at least occasionally, have sex like a man. The TT could be explained by a strong ideological norm according to which French women are believed not to report having sexual intercourse with men to whom they have not been romantically attached. In Béjin’s words:

it is as if women were systematically inclined to exclude from their recollections anything they felt had not counted (or had counted little) for them. This attitude should not be taken as a sign of dishonesty or hypocrisy, but may simply reflect the greater sexual selectivity of most women, a selectivity that applies not just in respect of sexual partners and practices, but also to the memories that women retain – and agree to share – of this behaviour. (Béjin 1996: 264)

Carrie’s non-admission in the TT appears to conform to the way in which most French women choose to remember and disclose their sexuality. Their alleged systematic selectivity certainly seems to have influenced the dubbing of the following telephone conversation between Carrie and Charlotte. As Carrie’s most



romantic friend, Charlotte finds the idea of ‘women having sex like men’ unappealing:

ST:

Charlotte: I’m not buying into any of that ‘women having sex like men’ crap.

Carrie (to the audience): I didn’t want to tell her about my afternoon of cheap and easy sex with Kurt and how good it felt.

TT:

Charlotte: Je ne suis pas le genre de bonne femme qui utilisent les mecs et qui les jettent après usage.

Carrie (to the audience): C’est pas le moment de lui parler de mon après-midi avec Kurt, je veux pas qu’on sache.

(SATC Episode 1 ‘Sex and the City’ [20])

While original Charlotte indicates that she does not believe in the idea of women having sex like men by calling it ‘crap’, French Charlotte disparages women who have sex like men and wishes to dissociate herself from their ‘kind’. However, if Charlotte truly felt that way, she would not be able to associate with her friends. In the dubbing, Charlotte defines women who have sex like men as vulgar women who use men and subsequently discard them after using them. The vehemence and moral judgement in the TT – which are absent from the ST – suggest a certain entitlement to evaluate another woman’s sexual behaviour. This echoes the belief (mentioned in section 2.2.) that French women are likely to view other women as potential judges in the domain of sexuality (Béjin 1996: 261). This notion of female judgement sheds light on the way in which Carrie’s words to the audience are also changed. Although the French equally conveys that Carrie does not wish to tell her friend that she has just had sex like a man, the TT adds a reason: Carrie does not want her ability to dissociate sex from emotions to be known. This is interesting for original Carrie’s decision not to tell Charlotte could also be read as a reluctance to shatter her friend’s romantic dreams of love and challenge her traditional opinions. In fact, this respect for each other’s life choices and opinions is a central characteristic of the heroines’ friendship (Jermyn 2004: 210). Importantly, the TT also omits how easily and freely Carrie engaged in casual sex with Kurt (easy and cheap referring here to how the encounter took place) and Carrie no longer mentions the pleasure she has derived from this sexual intercourse. As will become evident in the following section, the

disappearance of Carrie's sexual gratification is part of a wider translational treatment of female pleasure. Overall, Carrie is here rewritten into a heroine who feels a marked ambivalence towards her ability to be sexually masculine. The rewriting of these masculine aspects of chick characters' sexuality suggests a need to revert to dominant poetological and ideological models which favour gender hierarchy and mutually exclusive sexual behaviours. Poetics and ideology also seem to have been at play in the translational treatment of two traditionally masculine approaches to sex when displayed by heroines: pursuit of pleasure and sexual autonomy.

## 2.7. Sexual Pleasure

As previously mentioned, sexual explicitness, especially expressed by women, tends to be diluted and reframed within the more acceptable frame of passion and romance. According to Giraud, this is because, in the French language, the

représentation de la sexualité [...] est d'origine entièrement masculine. Ces images et ces mots reflètent une expérience qui, à de très rares exceptions près, est vécue et traduite uniquement par les hommes [...]. Ce langage [...] est très pauvre et le plus souvent inadéquat quant à la description de la sexualité féminine. Et cette carence du langage est une véritable castration qui empêche et interdit à la femme, non seulement de connaître clairement sa propre sexualité, mais de la vivre et de l'assumer. (in Yaguello 1984: 159)

This inadequacy of the French language to express sexual pleasure and desire from a female point of view explains many translational shifts. If female sexual enjoyment may sometimes be expressed through the language of fun in chick TTs, the angle from which this 'fun' is perceived tends to differ from the original. In the next example from the series *SATC*, the heroines discuss threesomes and Samantha, the most sexually experienced and adventurous of them all, advises her friends:

ST:

Samantha: The only way to do a threesome is to be the guest-star.

Charlotte: The guest-star?

Samantha: Yes, the girl the couple gets to come in, screw, and leave.

Carrie: The pinch hitter.

Samantha: Exactly. It's perfect. All the great sex without wondering what it would do to your relationship.

TT:

Samantha: Baiser à trois, pas de problèmes mais il faut être la star.

Charlotte: La star?

Samantha: Oui. Celle qu'on supplie de participer, qui s'éclate et qui dit au revoir.  
Carrie: La profiteuse.  
Samantha: Exactement! Ça, c'est génial. Tu prends ton pied sans s'inquiéter de ce que pensera ton mec.

(*SATC* Episode 8 'Three is a crowd' [21])

In the TT, the female third party in this hypothetical threesome needs more persuasion: she is a star who needs coaxing. Once persuaded to take part, her enjoyment is made more obvious in the French as 'screw' is replaced by 's'éclate'. This definition as a pleasure-seeking individual is, however, not free of moral judgement for once her deed is done, the *star* is defined as an individual dubiously taking advantage of the situation contrasting with the substitutive nature of the 'guest-star' conveyed by Carrie's neutral, albeit clichéd 'pinch hitter'. Samantha's conclusion on the greatest advantage of taking part in a threesome as the third party also undergoes a significant transformation. Both original and dubbed versions allude to sexual enjoyment without potential consequences but the TT is more specific. For original Samantha, the role of the guest-star frees individuals from wondering what a threesome would do to their relationship. As she here gives advice to three sexually, albeit serially, monogamous women, Samantha is likely to mean that being the romantically detached third party avoids the pain of sexual jealousy. The French appears to exclude such a possibility and presents the *star* role as a way for women to enjoy themselves sexually without worrying about their male partner's opinion of them, repositioning this discussion of sexuality and female sexual pleasure from a male point of view.

The next example is an extract from Miranda's conversation with her (male) therapist on her hurt at not being chosen by any of her friends for a hypothetical threesome:

ST:

Miranda: It bothers me. I'm attractive, I'm smart, right? Plenty of people should want me for a threesome.

Therapist: So, you're saying you're attracted to your girlfriends?

Miranda: No! But if your friends won't go down on you, who will?

TT:

Miranda: Ça me perturbe. Je suis belle et attirante, que je sache. Plein de couples aimeraient faire l'amour avec moi.  
 Therapist: Oui, bien sûr, certainement, mais vous dites que vous êtes attirée par vos amies, plutôt.  
 Miranda: Mais non. Mais seulement si vos amies ne veulent pas de vous, qui voudra?

(*SATC* Episode 8 'Three is a crowd' [22])

As Miranda is the heroine who is the least interested in fashion (Bruzzi and Church Gibson 2004: 122), 'smart' is unlikely to refer to her sense of style. Harvard-educated Miranda more probably sees herself as an intellectually as well as physically appealing individual, a fact which has been rendered in the subtitles (Appendix 20 [22]). In the dubbing, her intelligence is replaced by another characteristic directly related to her physical appearance: 'belle'. Original Miranda is hurt because her friends would not choose to perform oral sex on her given the opportunity. In the TT, the mention of oral sex is omitted and Miranda becomes upset because her friends simply do not want her. These changes result in a different characterisation of Miranda. As her intelligence and bluntness disappear, Miranda becomes a woman whose friends' rejection questions her self-definition as a purely physically attractive object. The first part of the original dialogue seems to have enabled dubbing authors to reinforce Miranda's sexual self-objectification and reduce her sexuality to her ability to attract men and women alike. This redefinition of women's sexual agency, pleasure and activity as sexual attractiveness is a problem Young-Eisendrath addresses in *Women and Desire: Beyond Wanting to Be Wanted*. She finds that in patriarchal societies, women tend to have sex 'through the looking glass' (2000: 58), reflected in their lovers' eyes (2000: 64) and that their desire is reduced to being sexually desirable (Young-Eisendrath 2000: 57). Young-Eisendrath makes a distinct link between 'the double bind of female beauty [and] women's ignorance of their own sexual pleasures' (2000: 58-60). The dubbing's emphasis on Miranda's position as a beautiful object wanting to be wanted rewrites Miranda into an individual desiring to be sexually desirable. As a result, the woman knowledgeable of what has been considered the most woman-oriented and pleasurable sexual practice (Collins 1996: 125)(Hite 2000: 339)(Kamen 2000: 74) disappears. Interestingly, a comparison between quantitative studies in Britain and

France shows no difference in respondents' familiarity with and practice of cunnilingus (Johnson and Wadsworth 1994a: 148)(Bozon 2002: 243). The difference appears to lie in the reported pleasure derived from it: while in the US and the UK, cunnilingus is portrayed as one of women's preferred sexual activities (Hite 2000: 339)(Collins 1996: 125), equivalent French reports are noticeable by their absence. In Mossuz-Lavau's comprehensive study, for instance, it is only mentioned by two respondents: a sexually adventurous man visiting a swingers' club (2002: 222-223) and a sexually dissatisfied young woman who prefers fellatio because she can identify with 'le plaisir de l'autre' (2002: 238). The absence of cunnilingus in Miranda's question could thus be said to reflect its relative absence in French mainstream discourses on heterosexuality and female sexual pleasure<sup>5</sup>. In this respect, French sociology in the twenty-first century closely follows the French language in which

le sexe de la femme n'est que lieu de la consommation de [men's] plaisir [...]. Du même coup, c'est la sexualité féminine qui est niée. Ce que confirment les noms de l'orgasme. Giraud en dénombre cinquante qui désignent l'orgasme masculin. Neuf seulement pour les femmes. Le vocabulaire érotique souligne ainsi le contraste entre la femme passive et l'homme actif. (Yaguello 1984: 159)

As this chapter has shown, this contrast between sexually passive females and sexually active males appears to be maintained and reinstated in chick TTs especially when it is subverted or reversed in chick STs.

In the next example from the series *SATC*, while orgasm itself is not negated as a female right, the manner in which the orgasm is triggered disappears. Here, Miranda talks of her new vibrator the 'Rampant Rabbit' whose ears serve to stimulate the clitoris by fitting around it. One amongst many fashionable woman-oriented sex appliances which emerged in the late 1990s, the Rampant Rabbit could be seen 'as an example of the way sex may be dissociated from emotion [...] legitimiz[ing] active, female, clitoral sexuality as normal and healthy' (Attwood 2005: 396). As

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<sup>5</sup> Its absence from such discourses might also originate from the fact that even a feminist sociologist such as Mossuz-Lavau defines sexual partners as 'ceux et celles avec qui il y a eu pénétration ou fellation' (2002: 126) thus limiting herself to primarily men-oriented practices. The section 'Ce que les homos font au lit' (2002: 215-217) thus only deals with homosexual men's sexual practices while another chapter on lesbian relationships (2002: 388-391) emphasises the legitimacy of lesbian identity but does not mention specific sexual practices.

Miranda delivers the following line to her unconvinced friends (whom she later converts), she holds her index and middle fingers up imitating the rabbit ears' vibrations:

ST:

Well, I know where my next orgasm is coming from, who else here can say as much?

TT:

Moi, je sais à quand remonte mon dernier orgasme. Franchement, je ne sais pas si c'est le cas de tout le monde ici.

(*SATC* Episode 9 'The Turtle and the Hare' [23])

Original Miranda refers here to how reliable the Rabbit's ears are in helping her climax and her consequent certainty as to *how* her next orgasm will be reached. She also jokingly contrasts her situation to that of her friends whose ephemeral and hesitant relationships with men do not make the knowledge of future sexual enjoyment as secure. Interestingly, French Miranda refers to *when* she last had an orgasm thus implying that despite – or perhaps because of – their intermittent sexual relationships with men, her friends would not be able to be as precise as regards the date of their last orgasms. The possibility of a linguistic misunderstanding is relatively unlikely here as the subtitles of this sequence retain the same time reference (Appendix 20 [23]). There may have been, however, confusion over Miranda's finger movement and a decision to interpret it as a 'dating back' hand gesture. This decision could stem either from the dubbing team's own ignorance of the vibrating ears and their function (despite the vibrator being shown on screen later in the same episode) or their discomfort with conveying the original meaning to a French audience. Although minor, the change in meaning could be suggested to reflect and reinforce dominant French ideological discourses on female sexuality which tend to devalue the importance of the clitoris in female pleasure. Nye, for instance, highlights the difference between French sexology where penetration is perceived to be the best method for female orgasm and American sexology where a combination of penetration and clitoral stimulation is emphasised (1999: 106). In France, Freudian interpretations of infantile clitoral pleasure and the primacy of the vaginal orgasm seem to prevail even in texts written by female sexologists about female sexuality (Dolto 1996: 306-309)(Flaumenbaum 2006: 175-200). In Anglo-

American cultures, such interpretations have long been denounced as myths which have essentially served men's sexual needs (Koedt in Groneman 2001: 137)(Livoti and Top 2005: 59-60). This difference between Anglo-American and French views of female sexuality and pleasure leads to numerous statistical and factual incongruities. In France, female circumcision may be argued to benefit women who can then 'vraiment jouir plus tard' (Dolto 1996: 307) and female masturbation can be believed to preclude potential pleasure during future intercourse (Dolto 1996: 308). In contrast, as early as the 1950s, Anglo-American reports have argued the exact opposite (Kinsey in Kamen 2000: 81). French women's reporting of masturbation is much lower – 42% in 1996 (Béjin 1996: 253-264) – than that of Anglo-American women: 92.3% in Britain in 1994 (Quilliam 1994: 83), 65% in 1993 (Schwartz and Rutter 1998: 44) and 82% in 2000 in America (Hite 2000: 610). French women are also believed to associate female masturbation with low self-esteem (Béjin 1996: 261), individualist selfishness (Béjin 1996: 264)(Mossuz-Lavau 2002: 229), a daunting or hated solitude (Ibid.) and a disgusting vulgarity (Mossuz-Lavau 2002: 227). Sociological reports also suggest that French women deem themselves to be physiologically incapable of experiencing sexual pleasure without the involvement of a partner (Mossuz-Lavau 2002: 229)(Béjin 1996: 264). The individual pursuit of sexual pleasure displayed by the *SATC* characters is therefore considered typically unfeminine from a French perspective. While female masturbation is no longer considered a taboo and is celebrated as a sign of female sexual autonomy in Anglo-American cultures (Friday 2003: 19-22)(Hite 2000: 610), in France, it is 'une pratique qui apparaît encore, en partie au moins, comme illégitime' (Birh and Pfefferkorn 2002: 280). Significantly, this partially legitimate practice is also reframed within male pleasure. Indeed, the higher coefficient of female masturbation reported to male interviewers is explained by the fact that the interviewed women knew 'that female masturbation was a subject of fantasy for numerous men and did not want to deny the male interviewer the pleasure he might derive from evocation of the practice' (Béjin 1996: 261).

An autonomous sexual practice such as masturbation is thus understood in the light of its ability to provide men pleasure. Women's own sexual pleasure – exclusive of men's – and their active pursuit of such a pleasure as portrayed in *SATC* seem to

differ considerably from the way in which female pleasure and sexuality tend to be represented and articulated in France. Whilst the consistency of the plot prevents the TT from avoiding all mentions of female masturbation, the removal of a sexual method which women could use on their own suggests that female solitary pleasure itself remains taboo, an activity that no ‘nice’ or ‘real’ (in Freudian terms) woman admits to engaging in unless a man can be there to experience pleasure from hearing about it. Chick characters are thus rewritten into women with a more limited knowledge and understanding of their sexual pleasure so as to maintain the dominant poetological and ideological gender hierarchy. As the next and final section will illustrate, heroines’ active pursuit of sexual pleasure, notably in the form of sexual autonomy and agency have needed similar poetological and ideological revisions in chick TTs.

### **2.8. Sexual Agency**

As I have demonstrated so far, chick TTs suggest that in romantic texts, sex as a female activity cannot be conveyed in the same way as male sexuality and cannot overly disturb a man-oriented understanding of female heterosexuality. The next passage from the series *SATC* exemplifies this. Here, Carrie’s voice-over introduces her friend Samantha to the audience:

ST:

Samantha Jones was a New York inspiration. A public relations executive, she routinely slept with good-looking guys in their twenties.

TT:

Samantha Jones, le meilleur coup de New York. Son métier: relations publiques. De ce fait, elle couchait régulièrement avec des apollons de vingt-cinq ans.

(*SATC* Episode 1 ‘Sex and the City’ [24])

While original Carrie praises Samantha’s sexuality for being inspirational, French Carrie praises Samantha’s skills in the bedroom. This change could reflect the dubbers’ reluctance to portray casual promiscuity as desirable from a purely female point of view. If Samantha’s promiscuous sexuality is viewed as desirable in the TT, it is from a male perspective for it is to the advantage of men that Samantha’s sexual experience and freedom makes her the ‘best lay in New York’. What is more, the TT



adds a consequential connection ‘de ce fait’ between Samantha’s profession and her sexual relationships with young men as if working in public relations involved meeting and sleeping with such men. One is here strongly reminded of the idea of *femme publique* or ‘femme de plaisir [...] vénale, pas chère; femme classée, en carte; femme de bordel, de maison close; femme à soldats. Prostituée’ (TLFi). The TT is also more specific as to the men’s age, therefore excluding men under twenty-five as Samantha’s younger lovers. This uneasiness regarding the youth of male sexual partners is shared by the literary translator of the novel *SATC* when describing Samantha who is as fond of younger men as her televisual counterpart:

ST:

We all admired Sam. First of all, it’s not that easy to get twenty-five-year-old guys when you’re in your early forties.

(Bushnell 1996: 40)

TT:

Sam suscite l’admiration générale. Tout d’abord, il n’est pas si facile de dégoter des types de trente-cinq ans quand on en a plus de quarante.

(Bushnell 2000: 61)

The much smaller age gap in the TT suggests a need to minimise what could be perceived as a reversal of the natural sexual order according to which ‘l’écart d’âge en faveur de l’homme reste la règle’ (Ferrand 2004: 93). A reduction of the exceptionality of Samantha’s ability to ‘get’ younger partners lessens the threat she poses to the dominant ideological model of the dominating older male and the submissive younger female.

The next example from the series *AMB* reflects a similar need to conform to this ‘hiérarchisation des sexes’ (Ibid.). Here, Renée reassures Ally that it is acceptable to objectify men by pointing out that many men have been interested in her solely because of her large breasts. Ally replies:

ST:

We’re women. We have double standards to live up to.

TT:

On est des femmes. On a été fabriquées pour faire fantasmer les hommes.

(*AMB* Episode 12 ‘Cro-Magnon’ [25])

In the ST, Ally's explanation for the difference between men and women is the double standard according to which women are expected to live up to their status of sexual objects while not sexually objectifying men in return. Ally's mention of this double standard shows her awareness of this unfair principle and despite her reluctance to admit it, her sexual objectification of Glenn clearly shows that she belongs to a generation of women who 'question the 'double standard': a primary force in the past that limited women's promiscuity' (Kamen 2000: 47). Interestingly, the sexual double standard disappears from the TT and Ally confirms women's status as essentially sexual objects: women have been created for the purpose of making men fantasise. This shift re-establishes the natural order of men as active sexual agents and women as passive objects of desire, thus reinstating a 'double morale' (Ferrand 2004: 88) in favour of men. The following extract from *SATC* also suggests a necessity to tone down women's sexual agency and enhance men's:

ST:

Carrie: Is it that younger men feel safer?

Miranda: What's really going on here is sex. Good, old-fashioned, eager-to-please, do-what-I-tell-you-to-Eagle-Scout sex.

TT:

Carrie: C'est parce que les mecs plus jeunes nous rassurent?

Miranda: C'est surtout une question de sexe, de performance, de disponibilité, une question de sexe.

(*SATC* Episode 5 'Valley of twenty-something guys' [26])

The type of sex which Miranda enjoys in the ST is sex in which, as the older partner, she has the upper hand. She tells her submissive and eager-to-please younger partner what to do. This is not the case in the TT where younger men's greater sexual performance is emphasised instead of their sexual submission, reducing younger men's ability to make women orgasm to their greater 'capacité érectile' (Ferrand 2004: 96). Moreover, their original greater sexual selflessness is transformed into a greater availability, which establishes an opposition with older men who are assumedly less available. Through these changes, the superior position and agency from which Miranda controls the sexual act disappears while men's active sexual agency reappears. This reflects the way in which in French culture

le désir masculin et le désir féminin n'ont pas le même poids ni la même légitimité dans la vie sexuelle d'un couple. Même si les femmes prennent plus souvent l'initiative qu'il y a vingt ans, elles semblent toujours accorder une importance plus grande au plaisir de leur partenaire qu'au leur. [...] Les hommes continuant à être considérés comme les agents principaux de l'acte sexuel, le désir féminin est beaucoup plus souvent ignoré, comme si le jeu [des femmes] devait se cantonner à l'affectivité. (Ibid.)

In this light, one can see how Miranda's concern with her own sexual pleasure and her disregard for that of her partner reverses the way in which the French understand the roles played by men and women in the social unit of a heterosexual couple.

As I have shown so far, omissions, attenuations and transformations in chick TTs reinstate these roles. If repositioning women to their sexually subordinate place is not possible (for reasons related to the coherent development of the plot), the translational treatment of women as sexual agents and desirers can produce surprising results. In this next and final example from the series *SATC*, the four heroines discuss threesomes in general and which friend they would choose as a potential third female partner. Charlotte chooses Carrie, Carrie chooses Samantha and Samantha chooses Charlotte. Looking at them in disbelief, Miranda tells them:

ST:

Oh great, no, forget about me. [the others apologise profusely] You know, I'd do it with you guys. It's like picking teams for dodge ball all over again.

TT:

Ok, moi je sens le pâté. Merci les filles. [...] Mais avec vous, je ne pourrais pas. Je pense que j'aurais l'impression de baiser avec des vieilles pétasses en chaleur.

(*SATC* Episode 8 'Three is a crowd' [27])

Original Miranda draws a parallel between not being picked by her girlfriends, with whom she would 'do it', and a common sign of unpopularity amongst school children: being picked last in Physical Education when playing team games. The colloquial idiom *sentir le pâté* and the sarcastic *merci* in the TT successfully convey Miranda's bitterness. However, in the TT, Miranda does not elaborate on her feelings at being sexually, albeit hypothetically, rejected by her friends. Instead, the TT reverses the original meaning as Miranda states that she would not be able to have a threesome with her girlfriends because of their questionable sexual morality. While

one could read this significant departure from the ST as an attempt to emphasise Miranda's resentment, one wonders why she needs to characterise Carrie, Samantha and Charlotte as 'old sluts in heat' in order to express her offence. In the light of the patterns of deletion, weakening and manipulation explored above, I would like to suggest that these transformations are not creative additions to the dialogue but reflections of the dubbing team's opinion as regards the three women's previous conversation. Their expression of potential desire for another female seems to conflict with what constitutes an ideologically and poetologically acceptable expression of feminine sexuality. By not taking part in any hypothetical threesome and by rejecting and insulting her own friends in the dubbing, French Miranda defines her friends' potential sexual attitude as unacceptable, abnormal and depraved. Unlike the ST, these women are linguistically 'punished' for displaying sexual agency and desire.

### **3. Conclusion**

This comparative analysis has shown that the characteristics of chick heroines which pose the greatest threat to patriarchal notions of femininity in the private sphere tend to be silenced, judged or transformed in translation. The shifts could be said to present us with the dominant ideology of France where notions of female beauty, femininity and sexuality are intertwined with the image of the courtesan or the prostitute. The predominance of this image seems to make it difficult, linguistically, to express women's body image and sexual roles outside of the desirable ability to attract men or to offer their body in exchange for material or professional favours. Furthermore, French discursive practices, notably sociological and journalistic reports, appear to make it equally difficult to articulate women's ability to separate love from the sexual act. Thus, when women display sexual qualities traditionally associated with men such as autonomy, agency, pleasure and desire, the figures of the sexual object, the morally depraved prostitute, the passive animal in heat and the badly behaved *garce* surface in the process of translation, revealing a conservative and essentialist vision of women's sexuality as inherently subordinate to men's.

Once again, poetological factors seem to have intervened on the same level as ideological ones. As mentioned in Chapter 3 (section 4.1.3), French editors and dubbing authors of chick texts consciously delete and transform sexually explicit elements when they are deemed *indiffusable*, offensive or unnecessary to the genre. As providing desirable models of feminine heterosexuality is central to the poetics of the romantic genre, the ideological message seems particularly clear: feminine sexuality and masculine sexuality are to be understood and articulated in a mutually exclusive manner.

Ultimately, the findings of this chapter generate more questions than it has answered, notably about existing representations of sexually autonomous femininity in French culture and the Anglo-American stereotype of France as a sexually permissive country. A visit to any French bookshop would indeed confirm that portrayals of sexually autonomous women exist in French literature but are found in an altogether different genre: erotica. The publication of Catherine Millet's *La vie sexuelle de Catherine M.* in 2001 seems to have prompted a literary trend of erotica written about, for and by women. The visual contrast between the sober black and white pictures of nudes featuring on these novels' covers and translated chick lit novels' bright jackets suggest that this genre is aimed at a more sophisticated and mature readership than chick TTs. Moreover, *The Sexual Life of Catherine M.*, the English translation of Millet's novel, presents an interesting point of comparison to the French versions of chick texts. A brief analysis of its paratexts suggests that the scandal and debate its publication triggered in France is curiously omitted from its British marketing. In fact, *The Sexual Life of Catherine M.* is presented as evidence that women have reached equality and can now dissociate sex from emotions<sup>6</sup>. Yet, for representing female sexuality as distinct from love, Catherine Millet has received a type of verbal abuse which singularly echoes the findings of the present study: she was 'trait[ée] de "pute", de "nymphomane" ou de "vierge folle"' (Millet 2006: ix). The *skopos* of *The Sexual Life of Catherine M.* is even more interesting. It was indeed predicted that in Britain, the English translation would 'probably confirm the

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<sup>6</sup> The review featuring on the back cover of the book's British edition reads: 'A phenomenal bestseller in France and in all other countries in which it has been published, *The Sexual Life of Catherine M.* is very much a manifesto of our times – when the sexual equality of women is a reality and where love and sex have gone their own separate ways'.

British stereotypes of the French as a nation of rabbits [and] be given a sympathetic reading by a Sex and the City generation of women whose sexual encounters are numerous and guilt-free' (Ayrton in Berens 2002: 30). There is here an ironic paradox between the way in which the French versions of *SATC* and other chick texts tend to find heroines guilty of depravation and prostitution and the way in which Millet's work in English aims to comfort the type of women which *SATC* is believed to address and represent in their sexual behaviour.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I placed poetics and ideology in the foreground in order to understand their impact on the initiation and production of the French translations of heroine-centred and women-oriented fictions or chick texts. I started by demonstrating that the poetics and ideology of chick texts were more complex than one would expect and that this appeared to be one of the reasons for their success and the claims that they encapsulate 'modern femininity'. I then turned to the French cultural context and delineated the poetological and ideological parameters most likely to affect the introduction, position and production of the French translations of chick texts: the paradoxical position of heroine-centred and women-oriented texts; the social function of texts containing a romantic plot; the mutual exclusion of sentimentalism and realism in the dominant poetics; and the rejection, selection and adaptation of chick texts' generic predecessors. Despite chick texts' generic hybridity and ideological complexity, most patrons of chick TTs have been shown to place chick texts firmly within the romantic genre. This means that commissioned translations were expected to operate as pleurably fluid and morally appropriate texts providing young women with entertaining romances and heroines to whom they could relate. This resulted in specific rewriting strategies, notably as regards the 'modern femininity' which chick heroines have been claimed to embody.

My comparative analysis revealed distinct patterns of deletion, weakening and transformation as regards women's professional and economic power, female sexual autonomy and heroines' understanding of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal structures, in other words, the characteristics of female protagonists which clash the most with patriarchal notions of femininity. In order to be ideologically and poetologically acceptable, chick TTs have reintroduced gender hierarchy and reverted to a pre-existing model of romantic heroine first introduced by translations published by Harlequin in the 1980s. This heroine was an independent working woman but her limited professional abilities, ambitions and power did not threaten the hero's masculinity. Moreover, her sexuality had also been significantly rewritten

in translation when it was deemed to overstep the limits of acceptable expression of female desire and pleasure. The findings of this thesis suggest that generic and ideological expectations seem to have operated simultaneously in the French translations of chick texts. As the social function of the genre into which chick texts have been rewritten requires the gender representations to conform to dominant ideological discourses, both genre and gender seem to have affected the translational rendering of modern femininity in the chick TTs analysed here. As I have shown, representations of professionally successful women and sexually autonomous heroines do exist in the French cultural system but in seemingly hermetic genres: crime fiction and erotica. Unlike the romantic genre, these genres do not seem to be solely women-oriented nor understood as texts providing young females with models of femininity. If images of professionally successful and sexually autonomous femininity do exist in French culture, this thesis suggests that they may be too offensive or superfluous to appear in romantic texts aimed at a young female public.

Three main achievements could be identified in this project. Firstly, as this thesis sheds light on the subtle differences between French and Anglo-American generic traditions and gender ideologies, this research could be said to add to an emerging body of case studies which examine poetological and ideological revisions in the French translations of Anglo-American heroine-centred and women-oriented fictional texts (Cossy 2004, 2006, 2006a)(Cossy and Saglia 2005)(Le Brun 2003). As the rewriting of femininity and its impact on the characterisation of the chick heroine have been the focus of this research, this thesis also obliquely contributes to the interdisciplinary field which aims to understand how female figures – real and fictional – are remodelled and rewritten according to certain poetics and ideologies (Lefevere 1992: 59-72)(Littau 1995)(Baty 1995)(Loewy 1999). Secondly, as this thesis has shown, poetological and ideological parameters come into focus clearly when translations are examined as part of a large corpus of texts and from a specific poetological understanding and ideological stand. The selection of a thematically linked corpus – which is still relatively uncommon in translation and intercultural studies – could advance a new paradigm in the analysis of poetological and ideological manipulations in translation: a self-reflexive approach which favours transversal examinations of specific aspects in thematically linked corpora. Thirdly,



women's entertainment, produced and translated for mass consumption, reaches a much broader audience worldwide than any other type of discourse and plays an important part in women's socialisation. The study of such texts in translation constitutes one useful way of detecting the unspoken gender values of the cultures for which, about which and by which they are produced. Interdisciplinary studies of translation across cultural forms aimed at women appear all the more important when one considers how these seemingly transparent and natural ideological values have precluded genuine progress towards gender equality. If one wishes to understand why certain inequalities persist in certain areas in certain cultures, fictional representations of women aimed at entertaining women could be a good place to start.

Like many descriptive and systemic studies, this project aims to be a self-contained piece of research as well as a departure for further work. For instance, regarding the material under study here, it would be interesting to assess how dubbing and subtitles influence French viewers' perception of the heroines via purposefully designed audience-response empirical studies. It would be equally interesting to compare the findings of such studies with those of existing work on audience-response to chick texts (Jermyn 2004)(Hermes 2006). With the notable exceptions of Jane Austen's novels (Cossy 2004, 2006, 2006a) and Harlequin romances (Paizis 1998), the majority of chick texts' predecessors have yet to be fully examined in French translation. One possible line of analysis could aim to uncover why so many of these texts have been explicitly defined as adaptations rather than translations and which specific elements needed to be adapted. Such studies could situate these adaptations in their immediate institutional and historical environment and could refine and complete the systemic map of women-oriented texts translated into French sketched out in Chapter 2.

This study could only feasibly explore the selection, initiation and production of eight French translations of chick texts which were amongst the first to be initiated and/or to be successful in the French cultural system. However, many more French translations of chick texts have also been produced and broadcast or published: e.g. the subsequent episodes and seasons of both *SATC* and *AMB*; sequels or other novels

by the authors analysed here as well as texts by other chick lit writers such as Isabel Wolff and Marian Keyes whose French translations were commissioned by different patrons. One could determine whether poetological and ideological constraints operated in the same way as they did in my corpus. A cursory look at Marian Keyes's novels in French translation actually suggests an even more extreme form of poetological and ideological rewriting. Despite featuring 'texte intégral' on their covers, Keyes's French translations omit many passages, paragraphs and even chapters. In *Le Club de la dernière chance* – the French version of *Last Chance Saloon* – negative characterisations of male protagonists, female overconsumption, underage binge-drinking and explicit references to sex consistently disappear.

As a matter of fact, the case of *Le Club de la dernière chance* exemplifies how opportunities for further research are virtually endless in the area of chick culture and the rewriting of femininity. Indeed, *Le Club de la dernière chance* led to a French cinematic adaptation entitled *Au secours! J'ai 30 ans!* in which locations and characters were transposed in France. As this film was based on a heavily rewritten text, one could try and identify traces of the original figure of the chick and the multiple poetological and ideological constraints under which she was redrawn. Similarly, further research could focus on the impact of chick TTs on the poetological and ideological parameters of the French literary and audiovisual systems. The French-produced series *Clara Sheller* – whose eponymous heroine is a thirty-something single journalist who shares a flat with her homosexual best friend in the French capital – seems to draw directly on the poetics of chick texts. First broadcast by France 2 in 2005, this award-winning series suggests that the dominant poetics of French televisual fiction have been sufficiently recodified so as to allow previously unacceptable combinations of poetological elements. It seems that the figure of the chick is now evolving on her own in the French cultural system in a way which echoes her multimodal progression in Anglo-American cultures. *Clara Sheller* also suggests that this French figure of the chick can cross cultural boundaries: a German television channel bought and adapted the concept, relocating its plot and characters in Berlin.

All these transmutations of the chick offer fertile grounds for further research. Another potential area of exploration could be the recent development of a heroine-centred and women-oriented genre in the French literary system. Primarily written by young and urban female journalists, these novels are often integrated in the 'Comédie' series which were initially created for translated chick lit. One could investigate the extent to which the French translations of chick lit novels have influenced the poetics and ideologies of this new genre. As France is not the only non-English speaking country to have developed its own local chick lit, cross-cultural comparative analyses could shed light on the various ways in which the figure of the chick is written and rewritten to conform to or subvert the dominant poetics and ideology of each culture. Like the present thesis, such studies would further our understanding of the malleability of genre and gender in translation and beyond.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Chick Lit Novels Whose Adaptation Rights Had Been Bought For Adaptation By 2004

Title	Production Company
<i>TDWP</i>	Fox
<i>Rachel's Holiday</i> (Keyes 1997)	BBC
<i>The Nanny Diaries</i> (McLaughlin and Kraus 2002)	Miramax
<i>I Don't Know How She Does It</i> (Pearson 2003)	Miramax
<i>Can You Keep a Secret?</i> (Kinsella 2003)	Paramount
<i>Just Friends</i> (Sisman 2000)	Warner Brothers
<i>In Her Shoes</i> (Weimer 2002)	Fox



## Appendix 2: Bridget Jones's Diary and Social Truth

Unless otherwise indicated, individual publications' names are given as they appear on the back jackets and inside pages of *BJD* and its sequel *Bridget Jones: the Edge of Reason* (Fielding 2000).

Review	Newspaper
A perfect zeitgeist of single female woes.	<i>Daily Mail</i>
She <i>captures</i> what – alas – it is like to be female.	<i>Daily Mail</i>
A brilliant evocation of the life of a single girl.	<i>The Times</i>
<i>Bridget Jones's Diary</i> rings with the unmistakable tone of something that is true to the marrow.	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>
Any woman of a certain age can recognize elements of Bridget in herself.	<i>Daily Telegraph</i>
An accurate-to-the-letter example of a specific social group (thirtysomething professional single women) [...]. Fielding has identified a phenomenon which will not go away, and, if anything, is multiplying in strength.	<i>London Evening Standard</i> (Watson in Philips 2000: 298)

### Appendix 3: Socially Insightful Chick Lit

Individual publications' and reviewers' names are given as they appear on chick texts' packaging.

Novel	Review	Source
<i>MLOP</i>	A brilliant take on modern matrimony.	<i>Evening Standard</i>
	The ideal gift for any friend caught mooning over <i>Bride</i> magazine.	<i>Guardian</i>
<i>Straight Talking</i> (Green 2003)	Poignant look at love and sex in the 90s.	<i>Elle</i>
	Packed with familiar situations for all those who've ever embarked on the dating game.	<i>Sunday Time</i>
<i>Babyville</i> (Green 2002)	Unputdownable novel about the impact of maternity.	<i>Hello!</i>
<i>Spellbound</i> (Green 2006)	Insightful take on modern marriage.	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>
<i>Out of the Blue</i> (Wolff 2001)	A brilliant witty look at love and life after marriage.	<i>You</i>
<i>The Trials of Tiffany Trott</i> (Wolff 1998)	Loads of women will identify with Tiffany Trott's wonderfully entertaining journey through the love jungle.	<i>Grace Wynne-Jones</i>
	Honest look at the modern dating game.	<i>The Time</i>
	On the compulsive reading lists for thirtysomething women and anyone interested in understanding them.	<i>Literary Review</i>
	Read before dating!	Kathy Lette
<i>I Don't Know How She Does It</i> (Pearson 2003)	A bible for the working woman.	Oprah Winfrey
	The definite social comedy of working motherhood.	<i>Washington Post</i>

## Appendix 4: Sample of Readers' Responses to Three Chick Lit Novels on Amazon.co.uk

Novel	Review
<i>MM</i>	Libby is a great character which I am sure many women could relate to.
	[Green's] third novel expands even more on her skill to make you associate the characters with the real people you and I both know.
	<i>MM</i> tells the (painfully accurate) story of a woman faced with a (man-involved) dilemma.
<i>MLOP</i>	A good reflection of real life as any 'normal' person sees it.
	You feel yourself smirking at the recognisable things that we all do but don't admit to!!
	Nodding at nearly every single page going 'yes, yup, been there'.
<i>BJD</i>	The most universally identifiable character I think I have ever come across.
	Simply puts into words what a nation of women are thinking.
	Very similar to real women.

## Appendix 5: Sharpness of Chick Lit's Humour

Individual publications' names are given as they appear on chick texts' packaging.

Novel	Review	Source
<i>BJD</i>	Observed with merciless, flamboyant wit.	<i>Sunday Times</i>
	Hilariously funny, miraculously observed.	<i>Daily Telegraph</i>
	Brilliant wit, comic timing and social observation.	<i>Daily Mail</i>
<i>MLOP</i>	Peppered with piquant observations and wisecracks.	<i>Literary Review</i>
<i>Animal Husbandry</i> (Zigman 1998)	[This] wickedly funny novel mercilessly exposes the behaviour of commitment-phobes.	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>
<i>Jemima J</i> (Green 1998)	Green writes with acerbic wit.	<i>Sunday Times</i>
<i>Sushi For Beginners</i> (Keyes 2001)	Nicely turned bits of zeitgeisty observational humour.	<i>Guardian</i>
	Mix of humour and wry observation.	<i>Image</i>
<i>The Trials of Tiffany Trott</i> (Wolff 1998)	Perceptively chronicled with wry humour.	<i>London This Week</i>
<i>I Don't Know How She Does It</i> (Pearson 2003)	Spiked with ingenious similes [...] and spot-on social observations.	<i>Daily Express</i>

## Appendix 6: A Sample of Reported Social Trends Using Bridget Jones as a Representative Character

Report's Title	Source and Date	Social Trend
Britain's Bridget Jones generation gives wine sales a boost	<i>The Scotsman</i> 09/02/2005	Female consumption of wine
Bridget girls fuel wine sales boom	<i>Metro</i> 9/02/2005	
Bridget Joneses will boost the house market	<i>Metro</i> 22/03/2005	Single property ownership
Bridget Jones factor...it still rules the roost	<i>Metro</i> 14/02/2005	Changing attitudes in intimate relationships
Bridget Jones generation is single... and proud of it	<i>The Scotsman</i> 14/02/2005	
Has modern man become the new Bridget Jones?	<i>The Scotsman</i> 19/05/2004	Rise in male singledom
'Brad Jones' is more apt for singles	<i>Metro</i> 8/10/2004	

## Appendix 7: References to *BJD* and Helen Fielding in Chick Lit Novels' Blurbs

Individual publications' and reviewers' names are given as they appear on chick texts' packaging.

Novel	Review	Source
<i>MLOP</i>	Does for divorcees what <i>BJD</i> did for singletons.	<i>Daily Telegraph</i>
	the Bridget Jones of the twentieth century.	Amazon.co.uk
<i>Animal Husbandry</i> (Zigman 1998)	with its echoes of <i>BJD</i> , is a punch and amusing read.	<i>Spectator</i>
	A transatlantic <i>BJD</i> .	<i>Independent on Sunday</i>
	A hilarious contribution to the Bridget Jones school of literature.	<i>Good Housekeeping</i>
<i>Running in Heels</i> (Maxted 2001)	Like Bridget Jones, it refuses to gloss over life's ordinary squalor.	<i>Vogue</i>
<i>Sushi For Beginners</i> (Keyes 2001)	Like Helen Fielding, Keyes has given romantic comedy a much needed face-lift.	<i>Independent</i>
<i>Pants on Fire</i> (Alderson 2001)	A witty modern romance... much more than <i>BJD</i> .	<i>Vogue</i>
<i>Milkrun</i> (Mlynowski 2001)	If Bridget Jones ever found herself at a loose end in Boston, she'd find a great friend in Jackie Norris.	Carole Matthews

## Appendix 8: Praise From Lifestyle Titles Used to Promote Chick Lit Authors

Individual publications' names are given as they appear on chick texts' packaging.

<i>Title</i>	<i>Vogue</i>	<i>Company</i>	<i>She</i>	<i>New Woman</i>	<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	<i>Marie-Claire</i>	<i>Elle</i>
Author							
Helen Fielding	+				+		
India Knight	+					+	
Jane Green		+	+	+	+		+
Marian Keyes		+					
Isabel Wolff			+	+			+
Freya North			+	+	+		
Kathy Lette		+					+

## Appendix 9: Anglo-American Post-War Romances published between 1945 and 1965

Author	UK/US	France
Jane Arbor	31	1
Barbara Stanton	21	4
Eleanor Farnes	17	3
Total (Arbor + Stanton + Farnes)	69	8
Barbara Cartland	46	16

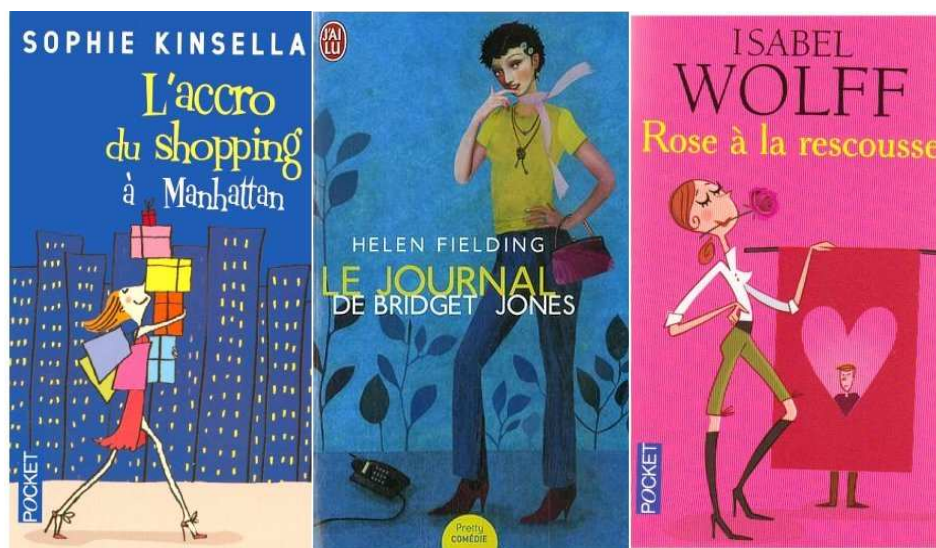
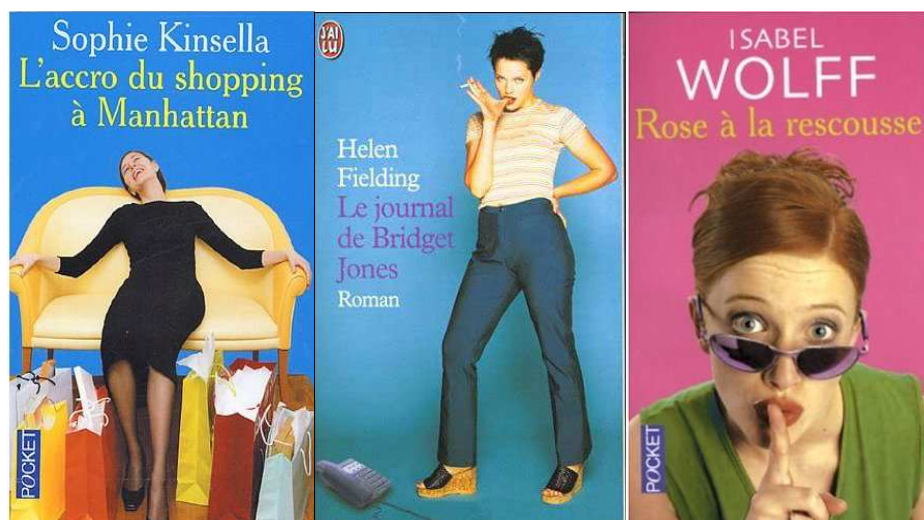


## Appendix 10: Pre-2004 French Covers of Translated Chick Lit novels





## Appendix 11: Pre-2004 and Post-2004 French Covers of Translated Chick Lit Novels (Evolution from Photographs to Illustrations)





## Appendix 12: Actors and Decors of AB Production Sitcoms



### Appendix 13: J'ai lu Promotional Display

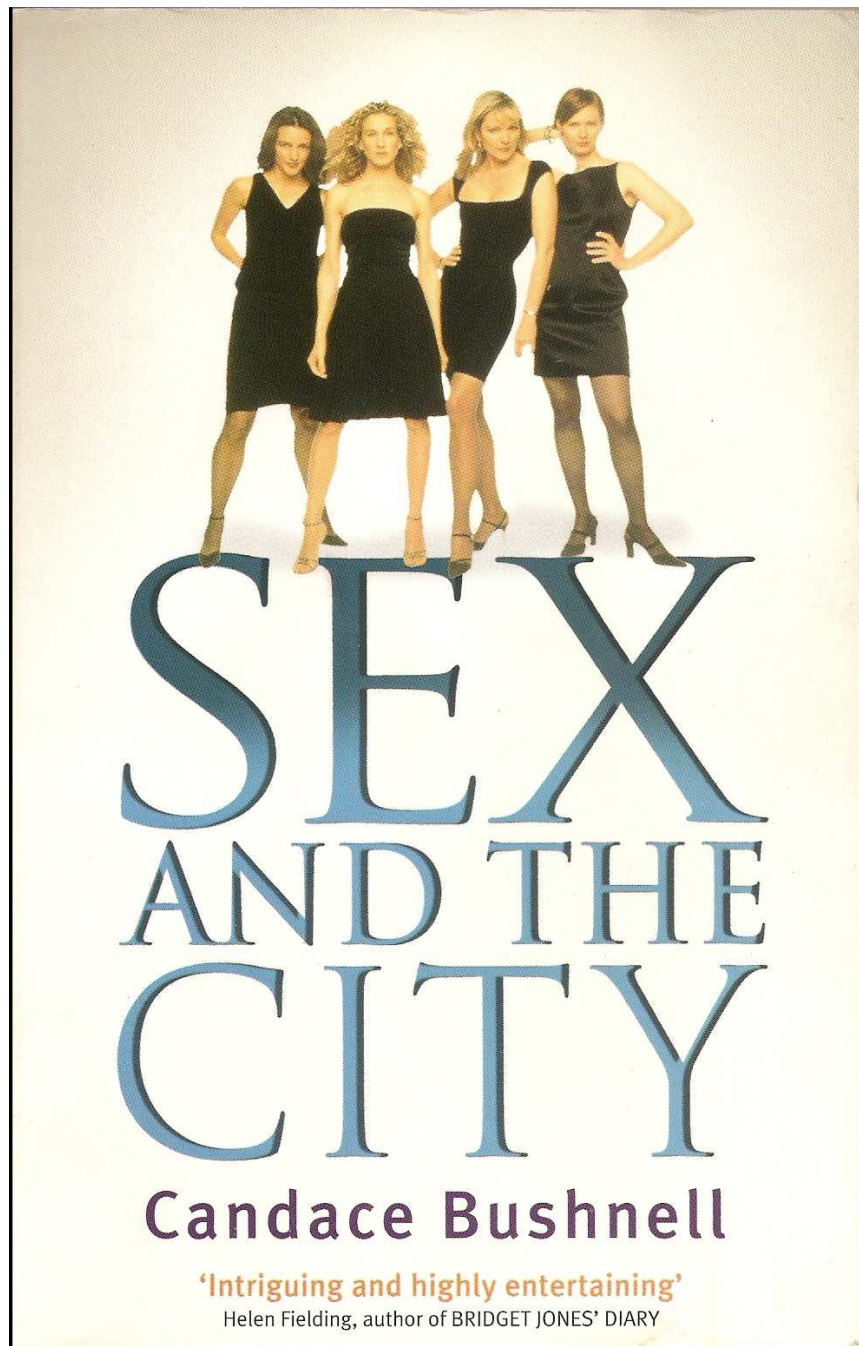


## Appendix 14: Analysis of Six Translated Novels' Epitexts

Title	Romance	Melodrama	Humour	Socio-cultural Realism
<i>Le journal de Bridget Jones</i> (Fielding 2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daniel</li> <li>• les hommes</li> <li>• le prince charmant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• atroce</li> <li>• frustrées</li> <li>• égoïste</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• comédie [...] ironique et tendre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• portrait d'une génération de femmes</li> </ul>
<i>Mon cœur « ping-pong »</i> (Green 2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• le grand amour</li> <li>• un mari</li> <li>• les hommes</li> <li>• son cœur</li> <li>• un mariage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• l'une des plus grosses fortunes</li> <li>• grandiose</li> <li>• n'ose pas se l'avouer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• comédie drôle, caustique et impertinente</li> </ul>	
<i>Ma vie sur un plateau</i> (Knight 2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• un mari tout à fait séduisant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• horreurs</li> <li>• mystérieux</li> <li>• tout pour être heureuse</li> <li>• idée dérangeante</li> </ul>		
<i>Confessions d'une accro du shopping</i> (Kinsella 2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• jolie Londonienne</li> <li>• amours</li> <li>• séduire Luke Brandon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• simplement magique</li> <li>• sublimes</li> <li>• fièvre</li> <li>• effrayant</li> <li>• vertige</li> <li>• vibrant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• registre burlesque</li> </ul>	
<i>Cul et chemise</i> (Sisman 2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• jolie Anglaise</li> <li>• mari idéal, beau parti et véritable gueule d'amour</li> <li>• Alliance, chandelles, soupirs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• idyllique</li> <li>• réconfortante</li> <li>• impressionnant</li> <li>• endurci</li> </ul>		
<i>Le club de la dernière chance</i> (Keyes 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• la belle Katherine</li> <li>• amants</li> <li>• amour</li> <li>• déception sentimentale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• leur monde bascule</li> <li>• douloureuse</li> <li>• un bonheur sans ombre</li> <li>• traumatisée</li> <li>• forteresse imprenable</li> <li>• relation désastreuse</li> <li>• sombre égoïste</li> <li>• étrange promesse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• caustique</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tableau irrésistible de ses contemporains</li> </ul>



**Appendix 15: Abacus Cover of *SATC***



# SEX AND THE CITY

*'Bushnell's beat is that demi-monde of nightclubs, bars, restaurants and parties where the rich come into contact with the infamous, the famous with the wannabes and the publicity-hungry with the gossip peddlers'*

**EVENING STANDARD**

Wildly funny, unexpectedly poignant, wickedly observant, **Sex and the City** blazes a glorious drunken cocktail-trail through New York, as Candace Bushnell, gossip columnist par excellence, trips on her Manolo Blahnik kitten heels from the Baby Doll Lounger to the Bowery Bar. An Armistead Maupin for the real world, she has the gift of assembling a huge and irresistible cast of freaks and wonders, whilst remaining faithful to her hard core of friends and fans: those glamorous, rebellious, crazy single women who are trying hard not to turn from the Audrey Hepburn of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* into the Glenn Close of *Fatal Attraction*, and are – still – looking for love.



*'Irresistible, hilarious and horrific, stylishly written . . . Candace Bushnell has captured the big, black truth'*

**BRET EASTON ELLIS**

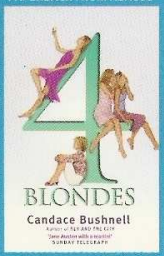
*'Jane Austen with a martini, or perhaps Jonathan Swift on rollerblades'*

**SUNDAY TELEGRAPH**

*'Hilarious . . . a compulsively readable book, served up in bite-sized chunks of irrepressible irreverence'*

**MARIE CLAIRE**

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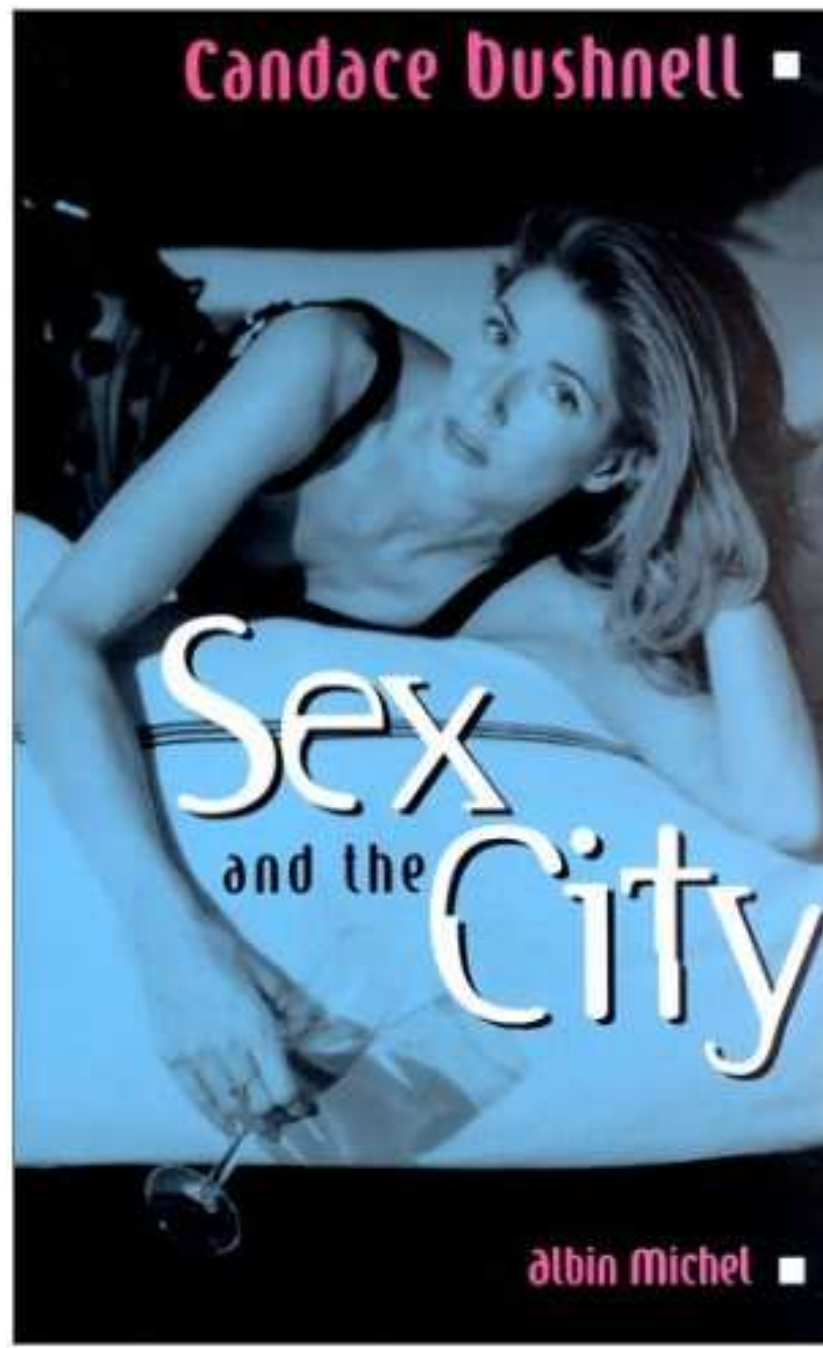
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ABACUS FICTION

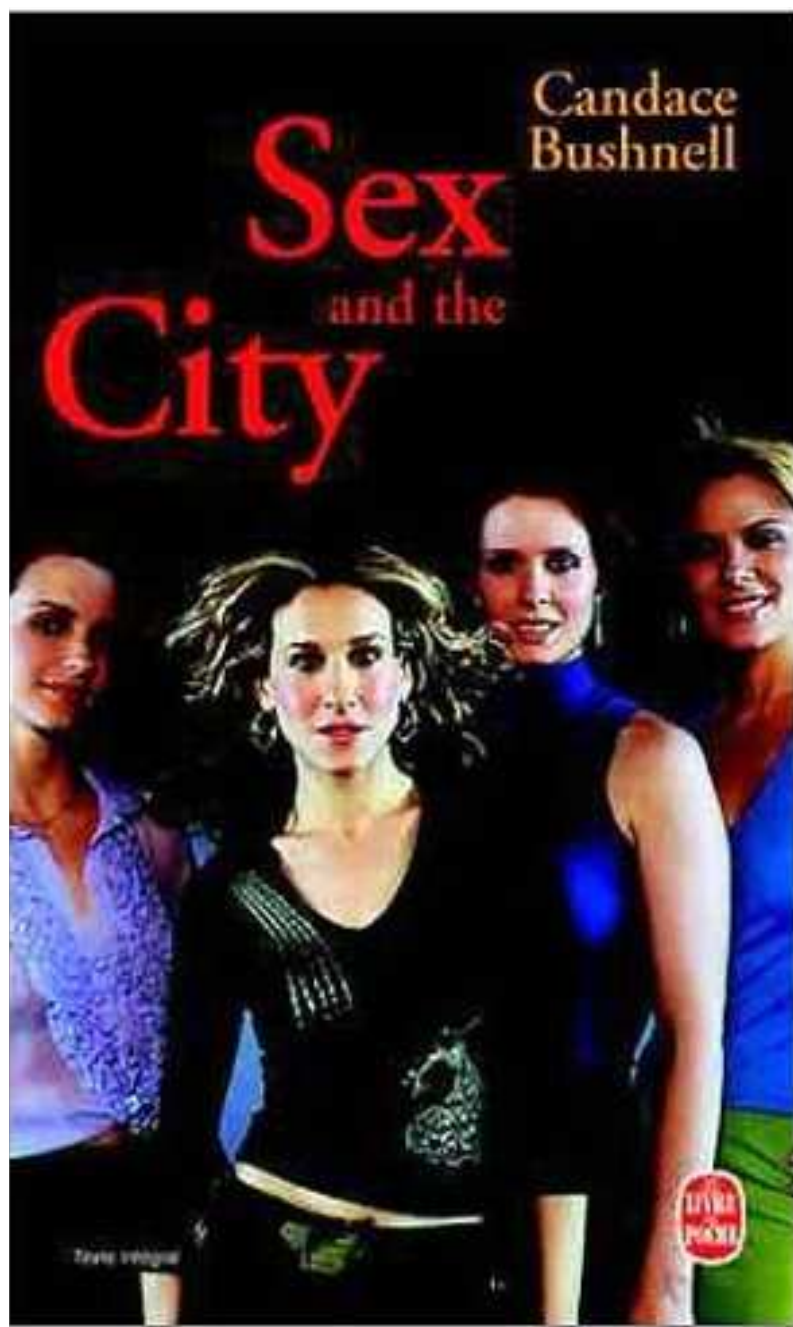
Jacket photograph: © Norman Swan Roy  
Author photograph: Alison Jackson



Appendix 16: Albin Michel cover of *SATC*



**Appendix 17: Le Livre de Poche Cover of SATC**



## Appendix 18: French Blurbs of SATC

Candace Bushnell

### *Sex and the City*

Elles sont journalistes, marchandes d'art, avocates, responsables des relations publiques. Elles ont tout pour plaire : jeunes, jolies, brillantes, sexy, indépendantes. Tout, sauf ce qu'elles cherchent désespérément : le partenaire idéal.

Dans la jungle new-yorkaise, les places au soleil sont chères, *Sex and the City* en témoigne. Devenue un livre-culte avant d'inspirer une série télévisée, cette chronique à la fois hilarante et terrifiante des mœurs amoureuses et sexuelles de l'élite de Manhattan met l'Amérique WASP en émoi. Il est vrai que Candace Bushnell, journaliste branchée du *New York Observer*, n'hésite pas à bousculer le « sexuellement correct » de rigueur, en narrant en toute impudeur les aventures de ses contemporaines, leurs états d'âme et leurs frasques sexuelles. Ou du moins, ce qu'il en reste...

Bienvenue dans l'ère de l'innocence perdue : un regard lucide et impitoyable sur une société qui fout décidément le camp.

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## Appendix 19: Subtitled TTs of Examples (Chapter 4)

[1]

Samantha: Qu'est-ce qui te dérange? Le fric est le pouvoir, le sexe est le pouvoir.  
Fric contre sexe, c'est un échange de pouvoir.

Miranda: N'écoute pas la Camille Paglia des supermarchés.

[2]

Subtitles of original version:

Pamela Jones: Je suis une cigale qui a chanté tout l'été. Comme Germaine Geer.

Bridget Jones: Greer.

Subtitles for hard of hearing:

Pamela Jones: Je suis une cigale. Pas Simone de 'Bavoir'.

Bridget Jones: De Beauvoir.

[3]

La femme la plus puissante de New York n'est pas Tina Brown, Diane Sawyer ou même Rosie O'Donnell. C'est l'hôtesse du Balzac qui était devenu le seul restaurant qui comptait.

[4]

Je fais carrière...mais je me sens seule...sans homme. Je me ferais lyncher par le MLF.

[5]

Subtitles of original version: Ces carriéristes!

Subtitles for hard of hearing: Ces filles qui font carrière!

[6]

Le célibat ne dévalorise pas un homme. 'Un beau parti' 'Une vieille fille'. Les femmes sont censées se marier, les gens intelligents faire carrière. Les femmes doivent procréer et rester à la maison. Et la société réprouve la mère qui travaille. Quelle chance on a face à une telle pression?

[7]

Je vous ai étudié à l'université!

[8]

Je l'ai fait une fois à la fac.

[9]

Je n'en ai aucune idée. Et j'étais première en cours de litiges.

[10]

J'ai été éduquée dans une école de filles!

[11]

Miranda avait travaillé sur une fusion importante.

[12]

Directrice de relations publiques.

[13]

D'habitude, il sort avec des mannequins, mais je suis aussi bien qu'un mannequin.  
En plus je possède ma propre entreprise.

[14]

Subtitles for hard of hearing: Je n'ai pas d'atout, pas de vrai métier.

Subtitles of original version: Je n'ai pas de pouvoir, pas de métier.

[15]

Si je pouvais le convaincre à exposer à la galerie, ça serait un coup incroyable.

[16]

Jack: Quels sont tes fantasmes?

Charlotte: J'adorerais avoir ma propre galerie.

[17]

Mike: Je suis directeur créatif dans une agence de pub, mais je voudrais monter ma propre affaire.

Libby: Je voudrais aussi monter ma propre affaire. Une crèmerie.

## Appendix 20: Subtitled TTs of Examples (Chapter 5)

[1]

Samantha: Et le sentiment de pouvoir est excitant. T'es à genoux mais tu le tiens par les couilles.

Charlotte: C'est la raison pour laquelle je ne veux pas m'y aventurer.

[2]

Deux types d'hommes craquent pour les jolies femmes: les vicelards qui cherchent à s'envoyer en l'air, et ceux qui tombent amoureux sur le champ. C'est pathétique.

[3]

Samantha: L'homme donne, la femme reçoit. C'est notre destin biologique.

Miranda: Tu penses ce que tu dis!? C'est le vieil argument des hommes pour exploiter les femmes.

[4]

Je trouve incroyable que quatre belles femmes avec les pieds sur terre puissent être intimidées par un fantasme. Regardez. Est-ce que ça vous intimide?

v.o: J'étais intéressée tout à coup. Si les mannequins faisaient perdre les pédales à des individus rationnels, quel était le pouvoir de la beauté?

[5]

Miranda: Les avantages donnés aux mannequins et aux belles femmes en général sont si injustes que ça me fait gerber!

Samantha: Mais tu es mignonne!

Miranda: 'Mignonne', ça ne compte pas ici. C'est quoi 'mignonne' comparé à 'super top-modèle'? [...] Je veux savoir quand les hommes se sont réunis et ont décidé qu'ils ne banderaient que pour des girafes à gros seins? [...] Notre culture impose des canons de beauté impossibles.

Carrie: Sauf que les hommes les croient possibles.

Miranda: Oui!

[6]

au sexe

[7]

leur sexualité

[8]

Pourquoi se taper la fille en jupe, si on peut avoir la fille de la pub pour la jupe?

[9]

Samantha: Les femmes ont le droit d'utiliser tous les moyens à leur disposition pour obtenir du pouvoir.

Miranda: Sauf coucher pour arriver au sommet.

Samantha: Pas si c'est nécessaire.

Charlotte: Mais c'est de l'exploitation!

[10]

J'enviais Amalita. Sa vie était un tourbillon d'hommes riches, robes de couturiers et vacances de luxe. Elle ne travaillait pas, mais possédait un pouvoir sexuel étourdissant qu'elle exploitait à son avantage, ce qui représentait une certaine énigme. Où est la limite entre petite amie professionnelle et professionnelle tout court?

[11]

Charlotte se la jouait 'fille difficile', mais ne voulait pas finir la soirée trop brutalement.

[12]

J'ai peur que si je continue, je ne pourrai plus apprécier l'amour avec un homme.

[13]

Ally: Non! On n'a rien en commun. Mais quand même...

Renée: Dis donc, on est en période de rut!

Ally: Ça n'a rien à voir avec la taille de sa...chaussure. [...] Il quitte le pays dimanche.

Renée: Deux bateaux se percutant dans la nuit.

Ally: Je me serais probablement abritée derrière ma prudence mais pas forcément.

C'est peut-être ce gamin de dix-neuf ans, il m'a mis la fièvre.

[14]

Mais est-ce qu'on connaît les gens avec qui on couche?

[15]

Les hommes voulaient-ils que les femmes soient faciles et sans attaches affectives? Et si je baisais vraiment comme les hommes, pourquoi ne me sentais-je pas plus en contrôle?

[16]

C'est interdit de se comporter en homme? Je me suis dit 'on ne vit qu'une fois!'. Sois un homme!

[17]

Tu crois que c'est possible ce truc des femmes qui baisent comme des hommes.

[18]

Je venais de baiser comme un homme. Je suis partie en me sentant puissante et incroyablement en vie.

[19]

Carrie: Je me documente pour un article sur les femmes qui couchent comme les hommes. Elles s'envoient en l'air, et après elles ne ressentent rien.

Big: Mais vous n'êtes pas comme ça?

Carrie: Et vous?

[20]

Charlotte: Et je ne crois pas ces conneries sur les femmes qui baisent comme des hommes.

Carrie: Je ne voulais pas lui parler de mon super après-midi de sexe facile.

[21]

Samantha: Il ne faut faire un plan à trois qu'en tant que 'guest star', la fille que le couple fait venir, baiser et partir.

Carrie: La remplaçante.

Samantha: Exactement. C'est parfait. On s'envoie l'air sans s'inquiéter de la relation

[22]

Miranda: Ça m'ennuie. Je suis attirante, intelligente. On devrait me proposer des plans à trois!

Therapist: Donc vous êtes attirée par vos amies?

Miranda: Non! Mais si vos amies refusent de vous lécher, qui le fera?

[23]

Je sais comment j'aurai mon prochain orgasme. Qui peut en dire autant?

[24]

Directrice de relations publiques – Samantha Jones était une inspiration pour New York. Elle avait l'habitude de se taper des beaux mecs de 20 ans.

[25]

Pour les femmes, il y a deux poids, deux mesures.

[26]

Carrie: On se sent mieux avec des mecs plus jeunes?

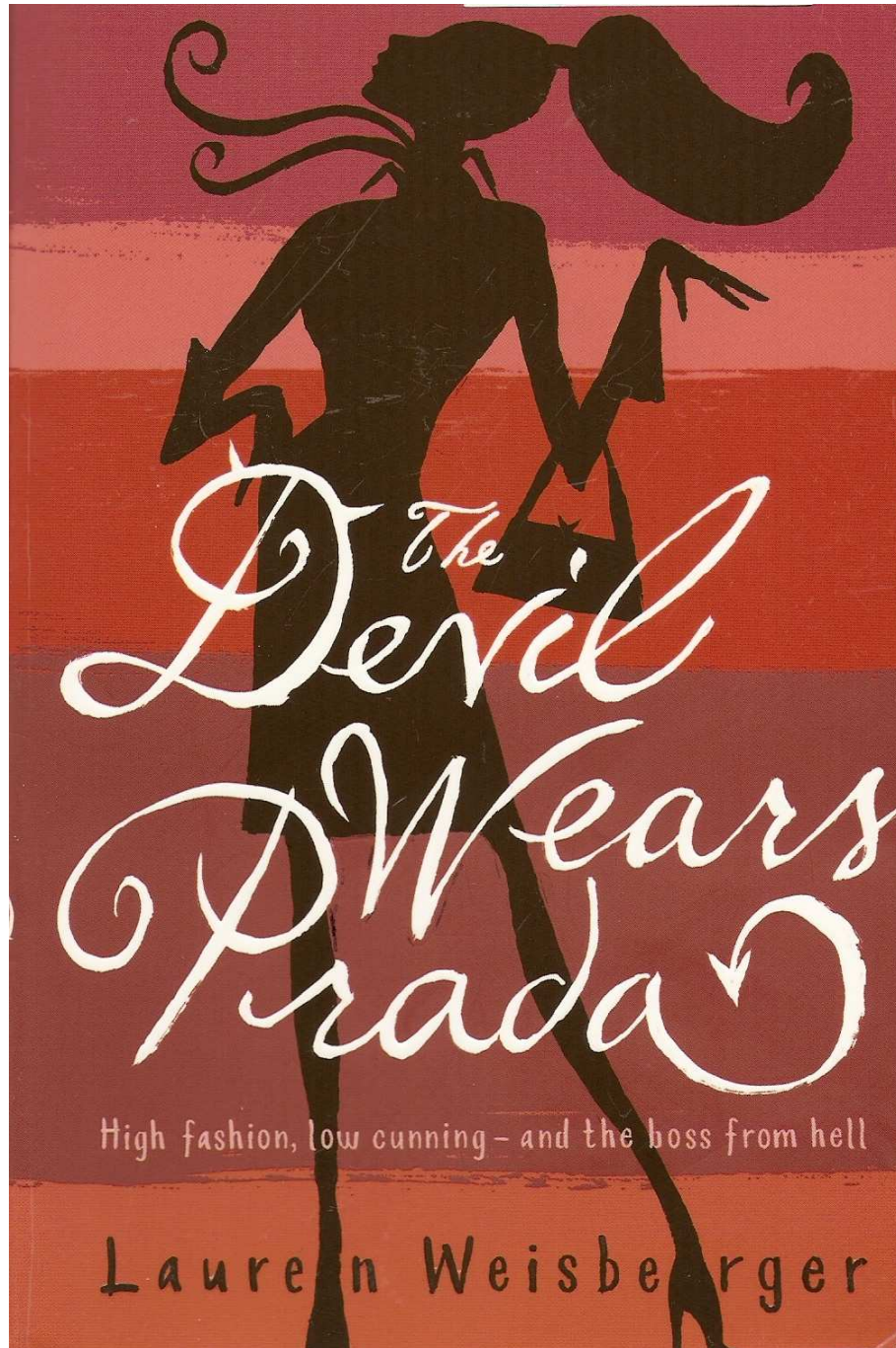
Miranda: Le fin mot de l'histoire, c'est le cul. Le bon vieux cul à l'ancienne, fais ce que je te dis, à la scout.

[27]

Génial, moi, on m'oublie. [...] Vous réagiriez de la même façon! J'ai l'impression d'être encore le vilain petit canard.



**Appendix 21: Original Cover of *TDWP***



Appendix 22: French Cover of *TDWP*

